

## OSU Extension Continues to be Able to Offer In-Person Programming

**(as of November 16, 2020)** As you saw in President Johnson's communication on Nov. 15, "We will continue our class-delivery approach as scheduled through Wednesday, Nov. 25. Our data continue to show that the greatest risk of transmission is in the household [or social], not in our classes, laboratories and clinics."

As such, for our Extension professionals, this is NOT a call to change our current approach to teaching in-person educational sessions that are scheduled to take place in-person over the next few weeks or months. **However, we will need to continue to monitor the situation locally and make appropriate choices about when in-person programming is necessary and/or feasible. And the ability to hold educational in-person programs can change, depending on the situation within each county.**

We are already working hard to keep our office density down and to have all employees teleworking as much as makes sense for their individual units (i.e., county or state offices, geographic locations based on the COVID-19 spread and local community need/demand, and unique accommodation situations).

It would be easy for me to simply say all offices are closed for the next few weeks; but, just as there are differences across states, there are differences in the number of cases locally, the approaches local governments are taking with regard to office and business closings, and the ever-fluctuating number of COVID-19 cases in any particular neighborhood, school system, or office.

I know it is hard to live in a continuously fluid situation where you cannot predict when or how you will best be able to operate. I also respect how tough it is to negotiate changing needs within an office as factors affecting the community and individual household needs evolve.

What I can do is offer the following decision-making strategies:

- Pay attention to your local statistics. Be sure to visit the Ohio Public Health Advisory System at <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/public-health-advisory-system> regularly when planning your programs or office coverage to ensure you are making the most informed local decisions about safety.
- Communicate with one another in your offices to see what the need is for coverage, who can do it each week (yes, review these often and talk frequently about how to share the coverage), and what formal or informal accommodations might be needed.



Decision-making strategies (*continued*):

- Be realistic about what programs need to happen in the next four to six weeks and determine if they make the most sense and are feasible to be offered in-person or if they should be offered virtually. We have about 24 exempted in-person programs scheduled between now and the end of Thanksgiving weekend. We also have a variety of in-person planning meetings, where virtual planning has not been feasible/effective. If these programs and meetings make the most sense to host in-person and you have an exemption, use your best practices and safety guidance to continue to keep everyone healthy. We have up to this point, through extreme diligence and adherence to safety measures, avoided contributing to the spread and have been able to keep our programming and offices open and available to serve the public.
- There will be some offices at various times that will need to adjust hours or strategies for meeting the needs of the public while juggling the need of the employees. As I have mentioned before, we each need to give our best to our communities, our organization, and colleagues, while balancing the specific circumstances of an office. I recommend frequent, respectful, and constructive conversations at the office level. If you are unable to work things out independently, please involve your area leaders to assist/facilitate strategies or to offer additional ideas. Make sure your Skype for Business tools are being used effectively from home offices (reach out for support and training, if needed).
- Communicate regularly with stakeholders (i.e., commissioners, volunteers, participants, community partners) to have a feel for how they are handling the increasing numbers in COVID-19 cases and ask what kinds of adjustments they are anticipating
- Assess the actual versus perceived pressure (by constituents or yourself) to offer in-person programming right now. Ask yourself, has this changed over the last few weeks? Is an adjustment warranted? If you have an exemption and you feel the need to cancel or postpone it, you are supported in doing so. Conversely, if you feel it is warranted and can hold it safely, you are also supported in doing so.
- As mentioned before, now is not the time to let up. We can reach others and keep doing our educational outreach, while also doing what we know contains the spread of COVID-19. We want you and those we serve to remain healthy and safe for years to come.
- As always, if you are struggling to meet the needs around program planning or office coverage, feel free to reach out to your area leader following local discussions.



Another useful tool (see below) is available to help you determine how increasing or decreasing program size in specific counties can contribute to or reduce session risk. Learn more at: <https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu>

The CDC has also released some new information on staying safe during holiday celebrations and small gatherings. Learn more at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

With Thanksgiving approaching, please be thoughtful about your approaches during the days leading up and through the holiday.

We continue to monitor the situation here in Ohio and learn from colleagues across the country who are also facing these unprecedented times. I know this situation can be tiresome and we all just want to enjoy time with loved ones and our clientele. However, these next few weeks will be incredibly important in contributing to the spread or the containment of the virus. Thank you once again for your continuing efforts to contain the virus and to care for one another.

**Note:** Dean Kress concurs with this decision and is supportive of the direction. Also, with Governor DeWine scheduled to speak on Thursday, we may have another update soon.

## COVID-19 Event Risk Assessment Planning Tool

