Current State of Practice

Constructing Facemasks and Face Coverings in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic
April 13, 2020

This state of practice document is based on responses to an open-ended invitation for institutional contacts at 1862 and 1890 land grant institutions to share information regarding how they are managing requests for assistance in constructing facemasks and face coverings to slow the spread of the COVID-19. Representatives from 12 states responded to the request for input. This document is not intended to communicate Extension policy, guidelines, or best practices. Rather, it is simply a summary of the responses received from institutions who chose to share their current practices.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, most state Extension services have emphasized the importance of hand washing, social distancing, not touching the face, general hygiene, and staying home if you are sick as primary methods of reducing transmission of this novel coronavirus.

In addition to the above-mentioned practices, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently recommended that individuals wear “cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.” The Surgeon General has reiterated this message and has produced a video that instructs people how to make their own face coverings. The CDC and Office of the Surgeon General are generally considered as primary information sources to which Cooperative Extension can refer clients who inquire about making face coverings for personal use.

In many states, Cooperative Extension (or a duly chartered affiliate) has been invited to produce mass quantities of face coverings to address the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) available for those individuals who provide essential services. In general, states who have responded to those requests have done so when the request is made by a licensed healthcare provider who also provides guidance for constructing masks which meet their specifications. In some cases, the requestor has also provided the materials for construction of the masks. In most all cases, arrangements are made in advance for requestor to take possession of the masks that are constructed.

In general, Cooperative Extension has not mobilized their affiliated groups to produce masks that Cooperative Extension directly distributes to the public. They are almost always provided to essential service providers through an effort coordinated by the provider. Extension volunteers and affiliated groups that are constructing masks outside of such organized efforts are reminded that their work is not being done on behalf of, or in the name of, Cooperative Extension.

Most state Extension services are operating within the policies and guidelines put in place by state and local government or their respective land grant institution as they make decisions regarding their response to COVID-19. Therefore, these approaches will likely change as additional direction becomes available.

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