During the COVID-19 pandemic, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension continues to provide resources and programming to Oklahomans. Information shared in this report covers the time period of March 23–June 5, 2020.

Research indicates that COVID-19 can be spread between people through speaking, coughing, or sneezing — even if those individuals are not exhibiting symptoms. The CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings.

As of May 21, 2020, through the efforts of Oklahoma Home and Community Education members, more than 40,000 masks have been sewn and donated to Veterans centers, hospitals, childcare facilities, doctors’ offices, nursing homes, city and county government offices, grocery stores, fire departments, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Connecting with Elderly Adults

Many elderly Americans have heeded the advice to stay safer at home, but studies show that the resulting social isolation contributes to elevated blood pressure, morning spikes in stress hormone levels, and disrupted sleep. FCS educators have made an effort to provide social engagement to elderly residents through phone calls, personal notes, facilitating and providing training for Zoom meetings, and social activity challenges via Facebook or traditional calling trees.

One OHCE member commented: “I was so excited that I could figure out how to connect to our Zoom meeting. I am technologically challenged and, at my age, I never thought I would be able to do this. This meeting was so fun and it was good to communicate with my friends. Staying quarantined has been depressing to me and this has lifted my spirits.”
Helping to Adopt New Technology

The need for social distancing has required government officials to find creative ways to meet, in some cases necessitating adopting new technology. FCS educators have assisted in setting up remote meetings for County Commissioners and District Attorneys offices.

Assisting Parents of NICU Babies

Tulsa County OHCE members came to the assistance of parents of NICU babies who were unable to visit and bond with their child due to COVID-19 guidelines. Fifty scent-cloths were created to be used to comfort NICU babies at a Tulsa hospital.

The parents wore the scent-cloth which was then placed in the baby's bed. The sense of smell is related to the part of the brain that controls memory, making it a powerful way to strengthen the bond between parents and their baby, as well as ease the baby's stress.

Adapting CNEP Programming

CNEP community nutrition education assistants adapted adult and youth programming into a remote education format to continue programming in order to graduate active participants.

Adapted programming included: developing guidelines for acceptable venues to provide remote education; instructions, training, and best practices for creating and disseminating recorded/live videos; and converting program forms, education materials, and evaluations for electronic completion.

Small Business Relief Education

Working with Oklahoma Extension’s Small Business Coordinator, an FCS County Educator held a program on SBA relief programs for small businesses. What started out as a program in two counties spread to four additional counties. The program helped small business owners determine if they were eligible to apply for a loan.

Transition to Remote Learning

FCS educators successfully transitioned from face-to-face programming to remote learning during the state’s Safer at Home order to meet learning needs and improve the lives of Oklahomans:

A Walk with Ease physical activity program which began before COVID continued with lessons mailed home and weekly check-ins via phone. Participants were divided into two teams and kept track of the time they walked each day; after six weeks the 14 participants had walked over 250 hours, averaging 42 minutes per day.

Live Well, Eat Well, be Active with Diabetes (LEAD) classes continued via Zoom. One participant lost 10 pounds in the first 12 weeks of the program, which is 5% of her beginning weight and close to her weight loss goal. This same individual reports normal blood pressure for the first time in 3-4 years and has successfully avoided being placed on blood pressure medication.

Food Safety Training for Food Handlers was offered via Zoom conference, meeting the training needs of school cafeteria workers and enabling a new food service establishment to be licensed and open for business.

Sharing Resources on Social Media

FCS educators have posted various lessons to social media, including: a weekly video series to encourage families to cook meals together, food storage and food safety, healthy snacks, COVID safety, mental health, face masks, and hand washing. The Facebook posts reached more than 139,000 people, with more than 15,000 engagements.

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