November 2020
Volume 15 # 11

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY WHILE WEARING A FACE COVERING

Wearing a face covering is an important part of keeping you and others healthy right now but they can also make talking to those around you more difficult. Face coverings can muffle sound and hide important clues about the speaker’s message and emotions. This can make it hard to understand speech, especially for those with hearing loss. Millions of people in the U.S. have hearing loss, including half of those older than 75 years of age.

Now, more than ever, it’s important to make an extra effort to communicate. Speak more clearly and louder than you normally would without shouting. Reduce background noise when possible. Be aware that physical distance can also make hearing more difficult.

Make sure the person you’re speaking with understands you. Ask and adapt if needed. You can also offer to use another method – a smartphone, paper and pen, or whiteboard – to get your message across. When it’s essential that you understand spoken details, like at a doctor’s appointment, consider bringing a friend or family member to help.

Face coverings can make communication challenging for everyone, but especially for people with hearing problems who often rely on lip-reading to understand what’s being said. Consider using a clear face covering to make your mouth visible, instead of a cloth covering. With a little extra effort and problem solving, we can all communicate clearly while staying safe. Source—News in Health; NIH; newsinhealth.nih.gov

GIVE YOURSELF THE GIFT OF GOOD HEALTH

The holiday season is approaching. At this time of year, we often think of giving gifts to family, friends, and special people in our lives. There always seems to be an abundance of food and a lack of time. We tend to indulge a little on those cookies and candies made for loved ones or the treats brought to the office.

Sometimes, with all the stress of making holidays special for other people, we forget to take time for ourselves. This year, give yourself the gift of good health.

• Find a good balance and exercise program. Physical activity can make daily life better. So, get more active and start feeling better right away. Moving can boost your mood, sharpen your focus, reduce stress, and improve your sleep. Talk with a friend and be accountable to each other. Let each other know how you have been physically active for the day.

• Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist. Take medications only as prescribed.

• Talk to your health care provider. Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling and share your history of recent falls. Make sure medication side effects aren’t increasing your risk of falling.

• Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses. Your eyes and ears are key to keeping you on your feet.

• Keep your home safe. Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe, and install grab bars in key areas.

• Talk to your family members and friends. Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. Falls are not just an issue for seniors.

Take time for yourself this holiday season and make sure to give yourself the gift of good health!
Now is the time for Medicare beneficiaries to compare Part D Prescription Drug Plans. There are 29 Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plans (PDP) available for 2021 in Kansas. Monthly plan premiums will vary from $7.30 to $88.10 in 2021 with prescription drug costs varying between each plan and pharmacy. Here are a few common questions with Part D Plans.

1. I had a Part D Prescription Plan in 2020. Does my deductible start over in 2021?
Yes, the Part D deductibles are annual so it will start over on January 1st. In 2021, your deductible may be up to $445 depending on your prescription drug plan. When you have met your deductible, your prescription plan will start paying their share toward your prescriptions. Some plans waive the deductible for generics.

2. I am happy with my Part D Prescription Plan. Do I have to re-enroll?
If you are happy with your plan, have read all correspondence and understand, including what your premium, deductibles, co-payments, and formulary will be for 2021 and are still pleased with your plan, you do not need to do anything.

3. When will my coverage start?
If you enroll between October 15 and December 7, 2020, your coverage will begin January 1, 2021. This is the annual open enrollment period and is the only time of the year that a Medicare beneficiary can change to a different prescription drug plan unless there is a circumstance of a special enrollment period.

4. Which plan should I choose?
Choosing a plan is a very much an individual decision, which will need to be based on a few factors including cost, convenience, the medications that you take, and which plan will be accepted at the pharmacy you want to use. Now is the time to comparison shop.

5. Where is help available?
Unbiased assistance is available with a SHICK (Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas) counselor in your area. Counseling is available at K-State Research and Extension’s River Valley District Offices in Belleville, Clay Center, Concordia, and Washington. Call your local extension office to schedule an appointment.

Time is running out to shop and enroll in a 2020 Medicare Part D Plan. The open enrollment period for Medicare 2021 Part D Prescription Plans began October 15th and will continue only until December 7th. A limited number of appointments with a SHICK, Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas, Counselor are available at the Extension Offices. Lessen the stress in your life by comparing and enrolling now. Contact your local Extension Office today to make an appointment.


**SOCIAL SECURITY INCREASE**

Social Security recently announced the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2021. Those receiving Social Security benefits of any kind should see a 1.3% increase in their gross amount for 2021. At this time, the rate for Medicare Part B premium for 2021, as well as Part A and B deductibles and copays, have not been announced.

**CLEANING AND STORING CANNERS**

As the canning season winds down, it’s time to clean and store the equipment for next year. Here’s some tips for pressure canners.

- Clean the vent and safety valve with a pipe cleaner or small piece of cloth.
- Check the gasket for cracks and food debris.
- If the inside of the canner has darkened, fill it above the darkened line with a mixture of 1 tablespoon cream of tartar to each quart of water. Place the canner on the stove, heat water to a boil, and boil covered until the dark deposits disappear. Sometimes stubborn deposits may require the addition of more cream of tartar. Empty the canner and wash it with hot soapy water, rinse and dry.

For more information, see [http://nchfp.uga.edu/tips/fall/store_canning_supplies.html](http://nchfp.uga.edu/tips/fall/store_canning_supplies.html)
Fall is here so I think of adding sweet potatoes to my menu. Sweet potatoes can add color, sweetness, and nutrients to meals, side dishes, and snacks.

There are a variety of ways to enjoy sweet potatoes, from baking or boiling to mashing and roasting. Sweet potatoes are a great ingredient to use in fall and winter dishes. Think of various ways to add sweet potatoes to the menu. Eat sweet potatoes as fries, grill them, use sweet potatoes as a salad topper, a sweet side dish, cube them for soups and stews or try a baked sweet potato.

Check out the following information about sweet potatoes:

- **Nutrition and Health:** Sweet potatoes are fat-free, low in sodium, cholesterol free, a good source of dietary fiber and potassium, and high in vitamins A and C. Keep to a minimum adding items like butter and brown sugar to a sweet potato. Taste the sweet goodness that sweet potatoes naturally have.

- **Selection and storage tips:** Choose firm, small-to-medium sized sweet potatoes with smooth skin. Avoid cracks, soft spots and blemishes. Choose sweet potatoes with a bright, uniform color. Sweet potatoes have a moist orange flesh that is somewhat brighter than the color of the skin. Sweet potatoes kept on the countertop in a basket away from heat should be used within one to two weeks or store sweet potatoes in a cool, dark, dry, well-ventilated place for up to four months. Avoid storing sweet potatoes in the refrigerator, which will result in a hard center and unpleasant taste.

- **Cleaning and preparing:** Before cooking, wash sweet potatoes under cool running water to remove any soil from the skin and scrub with a vegetable brush if needed. Cut out any bad spots. It is not necessary to peel sweet potatoes before cooking them; leaving the skins on gives a different texture and fiber in meals, side dishes, and snacks.

- **Cooking with sweet potatoes:** Sweet potatoes can be baked, boiled, fried, broiled, and microwaved. They can also be cut into chunks and sautéed. When cooking whole sweet potatoes pierce their skin several times with a fork and bake at 400 degrees Fahrenheit (F) for 40-50 minutes, or until fork tender. This baking time varies on the size of the sweet potato. Sauté sliced to diced sweet potatoes in oil for about ten minutes. Grill or broil one-inch thick slices for ten minutes or cut sweet potatoes in half lengthwise and grill 20 to 25 minutes. When microwaving pierce several times with a fork and place on a microwave-safe dish. Cooking time in the microwave depends on the size of the sweet potato. Rotate the sweet potato during the cooking time in the microwave.

- **Addition to meals:** Find a way to add sweet potatoes to a meal. Sweet potatoes go well with meats and combine well with other vegetables. Toss sliced sweet potatoes, Brussel sprouts and cauliflower in a bag with olive oil, add a sprinkle of a favorite seasoning and bake until tender. Eat roasted sweet potatoes with a favorite grilled meat.

Contact Sonia Cooper at 785-632-5335 for your questions about using sweet potatoes as a part of your menu.

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### HEALTHY HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY

The holidays are well known for food. Here are some food safety tips to help keep you and your loved ones safe these upcoming holidays:

- Frequently wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds.
- Use a calibrated food thermometer to ensure proper temperatures are reached.
- Clean out your refrigerator the week before Thanksgiving to make room for thawing items and storing leftovers.
- Store leftovers in shallow containers to decrease cooling time. This prevents food from spending too much time at unsafe temperatures.
- Do not prepare food when you are ill.
- Simplify the holiday celebration and assist in reducing stress by preparing foods the day before.
- Keep leftovers in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs if the food is traveling more than two hours away.

For more information about Holiday Food Safety, Contact Sonia Cooper, River Valley Extension; 785-632-5335. Source—K-State Research and Extension Food Safety for the Holiday Meals; Tips for Holiday Foods.

### FREE MEDICATION DISPOSAL BAGS AVAILABLE

With the upcoming holidays, don’t be the drug dealer for your visiting family and friends. Over 115 Americans die daily from opioid overdose. With the opioid epidemic growing, properly disposing of unused and expired medications is important.

All four offices in the River Valley Extension District have medication disposal bags available for free to the public. They can hold 15 pills, 2 ounces of liquid, or 2 patches. The disposal is as easy as 1 – 2 – 3.

1. Open the pouch and place unused medication inside.
2. Fill the pouch halfway with warm water and wait 30 seconds.
3. Seal the pouch tightly, gently shake, and dispose of the pouch in the trash.

Help stop the opioid epidemic and dispose of your unused and expired medications today. Stop by a River Valley Extension District office to start cleaning out your medicine cabinet.

For more information on the opioid epidemic and medication disposal bags, please visit our website at [https://www.rivervalley.k-state.edu/foods-health-nutrition/health.html](https://www.rivervalley.k-state.edu/foods-health-nutrition/health.html) or call your local River Valley Extension Office.
Recognizing the need for reliable, local lease information, the K-State Research & Extension Service, River Valley District, began conducting a yearly lease survey in 2012 that is current and relevant for Washington, Clay, Cloud, and Republic Counties. This information has proven very useful for landowners, ag producers, agricultural lenders, and extension personnel as they work through the various aspects of lease agreements.

Your assistance is needed. If you rent or lease crop or pasture land or have ag labor on your farm, please complete the surveys as applicable. All individual survey information is anonymous, will be kept strictly confidential and will be compiled with all responses. Please share with anyone in the River Valley Extension District that fits any of these three areas.

A paper copy of the survey goes out to two landowners or tenants per township throughout the District. In addition, NC Kansas Farm Management Association members and River Valley Extension Board and Program Development Committee members are invited to complete surveys, if they choose. With surveys going to just over 200 people, the greater the response rate, the more accurately the summary will represent what is actually happening across the District. So again, your help is vital to the success of this educational programming.

As we have done in the past, the survey data will be compiled and summarized in the 2020 River Valley District Lease Survey Summary. These summaries will be presented at our annual lease meeting to be held on Monday, January 4th from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the FNB Bank in Washington, KS. Summary Reports will be available throughout the year at all River Valley District Offices and will be available on the River Valley website for download. The 2019 Lease Survey may be found at the River Valley District website: https://www.rivervalley.k-state.edu/crops/Leasing_Survey.html for your reference.

With your smartphone, you can scan the QR code(s) in the graphic next to each survey that applies to you or visit our webpage at https://www.rivervalley.k-state.edu to fill out the survey.

Stockmanship and Stewardship is hosting a FREE virtual event that may be of interest to beef and dairy cattle producers. The dates for this free virtual event will be November 11 and 12. More information can be found online at https://www.stockmanshipandstewardship.org/ss-virtual-event

Day one of the event will have an interesting lineup of educational program tracks, including sessions that take an in-depth look at Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) topics. Jason Nickell, DVM, PhD, DACVP, Merck Animal Health will present on Individual Management Technologies and Diagnostics. A robust business track will be offered that will cover everything from risk management and cattle marketing to how consumers have shifted their buying habits during the pandemic and beyond.

With just one week past the 2020 Presidential Election, NCBA’s policy team will provide an informative election reaction. In this session, the policy team will discuss what issues the U.S. cattle and beef industry will be tackling in Washington, D.C.

Finally, day one of the event will conclude with a keynote presentation from Frank Mitloehner, PhD, University of California – Davis on recent industry happenings on the topic of Sustainability.

On November 12, attendees will have a chance to engage with another set of valuable sessions. The sessions will cover everything from the value of training producers and their employees on cattle welfare to panel discussions on genetic value and current traceability efforts. The event will close with a keynote from the experts at CattleFax sharing important information on the economic state of the industry, and what it might look like in the days ahead.

Learn more and register online for this free virtual training at https://www.stockmanshipandstewardship.org/ss-virtual-event.
TUCKING YOUR LAWNMOWER IN FOR THE WINTER

If you are done mowing for the year, be sure to service your lawnmower before putting it away for the winter. Here are a few things that you help you with the process.

Drain the gas tank of gasoline-powered engines or use a gasoline stabilizer. Untreated gasoline can become thick and gummy. If your equipment has a battery, you will want to clean the battery terminals. They sometimes corrode throughout the season; a wire-bristle brush is a good tool for this. The battery can then be removed or connected to a battery maintainer to keep it charged over the winter. Be sure to keep the battery in a protected location for the winter (a cool basement works best).

Now is also a great time to sharpen the mower blades so they’ll be ready for next spring. Sharpening rotary mower blades is fairly straightforward but the following steps will guide you through the process.

1. Check the blade for major damage. If you can’t fix it, the blade will need to be replaced.
2. Remove grass and debris from the blade with a moist cloth. Be sure to dry the blade before sharpening the cutting edge.
3. Remove nicks from the cutting edge by using a grinding wheel or hand-file.
4. If using a grinding wheel, match the existing edge angle to the wheel.
5. Grind or file until the edge is 1/32 inch. Sharpening the blade to a razors edge may result in the edge folding over during the next season causing a poor cut.
6. When using a grinding wheel, avoid overheating the blade as this might warp it.
7. Clean the blade with solvent or oil for optimum winter storage. Don’t use water because it will promote rust.

Following these tips this winter will keep your mower in great shape and save you time next spring.

WINTERIZING ROSES

Now that the temperatures have been getting colder, it’s time to think about preparing your landscape for the winter months. Most shrub roses are hardy to our Kansas winters, but a few types of roses could have problems adjusting to cold temperatures.

For example, the hybrid tea roses have certain species in their ancestry that originated in the warm climate of southern China. These roses need protection to survive Kansas winters. One way to help protect your roses is by mounding the soil about eight to ten inches high around each plant. When using soil, bring it in from another location. You do not want to pull from a part that has disease problems. Do not pull it from in-between plants because this can damage the roots or make them more susceptible to the cold.

Mounding is normally done by Thanksgiving. After the ground has frozen, add a 4-inch layer of mulch. The mulch can be made up of straw, leaves or hay for further protection. A small amount of soil may be spread on top of the mulch to keep it in place. Do not add the mulch before the ground freezes or mice may invade and feed on the roses over the winter. The purpose of these coverings is not only to moderate the cold, but also to prevent warm days during the winter or early spring from stimulating growth that is tender to returning cold weather.

If your roses have excessively tall canes, they can be pruned to a height of 36 inches or tied together to prevent them from being whipped by strong winter winds. Wind can cause major damage to the crown of the plant by loosening the surrounding soil. Next spring, remove coverings from the crown before new growth starts. Wait until after the ground thaws, as the temperatures are more consistent. If you remove the coverings too soon the tops may begin growing before the roots can provide water to the new growth.

If you have any questions, please contact Kelsey at 785-325-2121 or khatesohl@ksu.edu.

WINTERIZING STRAWBERRY PLANTS

Winter can be a difficult time for strawberries in Kansas. Plants need time to become adjusted to cold weather and will gradually become more cold resistant as fall progresses. Strawberry plants are able to withstand colder temperatures in the middle of the winter than cold snaps in the fall before they have gone through much cold weather. Hardened plants can withstand such temperatures with ease. For example, if temperatures suddenly plummet below 20°F before the plants harden to the cold, they can be severely damaged. A drop to 15°F may kill them.

Normally, strawberries should be mulched for the winter around Thanksgiving. Mulching plants helps protect strawberries not only from low temperature but also from heaving damage. Heaving damage occurs when the alternate freezing and thawing, common in Kansas winters, heave plants out of the ground where the roots are exposed and the plants die from lack of water.

Wheat straw makes good mulch if it is clean (free from weed seed and wheat kernels). The straw should be spread over the plants to a depth of 3 inches. Shake the slabs of straw apart so there are no large compressed chunks. This straw mulch not only helps protect the plants over winter but can also help avoid damage from late spring frosts by delaying blooming a few days in the spring.

The straw should be removed gradually in the spring as plants begin developing new growth. Remove enough straw from the plants so the leaves can be seen, but you will want to leave some straw in place. Leaving some straw in place keeps the berries off the ground and conserves moisture. Also, straw left in the aisles helps protect pickers from muddy conditions. If you have any questions, contact Kelsey Hatesohl at 785-325-2121 or khatesohl@ksu.edu.
The end of the gardening season is a great time to clean up and protect the wooden handles so they will last for years to come. Over time the wooden handles start to break down from weathering. Weathering raises the grain of the wood, resulting in splinters. A light sanding can smooth out the handle; then add a light application of a wood preservative like linseed oil or polyurethane to protect the wood. Be sure to clean off any dirt residue from the metal parts of the tool. Once the dirt is cleaned off, apply a light coat of oil to prevent the metal from rusting. Good gardening tools are expensive, but a few minutes of care after the season is over will keep your tools looking new for years to come.

**Fiber in Your Diet**

Fiber is one of the most important nutrients your body needs. As a part of your diet, fiber helps to keep your digestive system running smoothly.

Fiber is a carbohydrate compound found in plants and cannot be digested. There are both soluble and insoluble forms of fiber. Soluble fiber causes the food to move more slowly from the stomach to the small intestines. This can help make you feel full longer because your food is moving more slowly through your digestive tract. Insoluble fiber is important because it helps digest the food through the large intestine. Consuming fiber can make you feel full more quickly and help the feeling of fullness last longer. As a result, you may eat fewer total calories, which reduces your risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

The daily recommended fiber intake is 25 grams for women ages 18 to 50 and 21 grams for older women; 38 grams for men ages 18 to 50 and 30 grams for older men.

Most Americans fall short, averaging only 10 to 15 grams of fiber per day. Fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods are good sources of fiber. Good sources of insoluble fiber include whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, bran breakfast cereal, carrots, and cucumbers. Good sources of soluble fiber are apples, pears, oatmeal, and beans.

Fruits have more fiber than you thought. Did you realize? One pear (with skin) has 6 grams of fiber. That beats an apple (4 grams), an orange (3 grams), a banana (3 grams), or even a cup of blueberries (4 grams), but not raspberries (8 grams).

Maintain a healthy digestive system by including fiber in your meals. If you have questions about the benefits of fiber, contact Sonia Cooper at 785-632-5335 or srcooper@ksu.edu.

Source—You are What You Eat; www.ksre.ksu.edu

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**Falling Yard Clean-Up**

It’s that time of year again when leaves are falling from deciduous trees. Now is a good time to stop and think about options for handling the leaf litter. Although a scattering of leaves won’t harm the lawn, the excessive cover of leaves for an extended period will prevent sunlight from reaching the turfgrass causing the grass to be unable to make the carbohydrates needed to survive the winter.

There are other options for dealing with the fallen leaves rather than bagging them up and putting them out for the trash collector. Composting is a great way to handle the refuse. Compost can then be used in the vegetable garden and flowerbeds.

If you do not compost, you can mow leaves with a mulching mower and let shredded leaves filter into the turf canopy. A side-discharge mower will also work but it won’t shred the leaves as thoroughly. Mowing is often the most effective when the leaves aren’t too thick and you can still see grass peeking through the leaves.

While you are working to keep the leaves from piling up on your turf, you can also decide what needs to be cleaned-up in your flowerbeds.

Fall is traditionally a time for cleaning up flowerbeds. Normally, we recommend cutting down dead stems to help control insect and disease problems. But, with herbaceous perennials that have been pest free, you might want to consider leaving some to provide winter interest to your garden. For example, ornamental grasses can be attractive even during the winter months. But those near structures like your house, or sheds should be cut to the ground because when they get dry they could be a fire hazard. Perennials with evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage can provide color and structure.

Foliage can be left for a few other reasons as well. For instance, foliage left on semi-hardy plants will act as mulch to protect from harsh winter winds and help to ensure overwintering of the plant’s crowns. Another reason to leave some foliage in your beds is because of wildlife. Birds will eat seeds from the perennials, and others will use the plants as shelter. So this fall take the time to look around your yard and see what you can do to prepare your landscape for the winter months.

If you have any questions regarding your fall clean-up, call Kelsey Hatesohl at 785-325-2121.
Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle
Beef Reproduction Task Force

2020 ARSBC – FREE Webinar Series

Pre-registration is required for each session

Nov 4th: go.beefrepro.org/Cow_Heifer
Nov 5th: go.beefrepro.org/Bull
Vet CE: go.beefrepro.org/VET_CE

Following registration you will receive an email with session information and links

Nov 4th – Cow & Heifer Session
1:00-1:45 PM: Dr. Phillippe Moriel, Univ. of Florida - Enhancing long-term growth and reproduction of heifers
2:00-2:45 PM: Dr. Reinaldo Cooke, Texas A&M - Nutritional strategies for pregnancy success
3:00-3:45 PM: Dr. Cliff Lamb, Texas A&M - Utilizing sexed semen in AI and ET programs
4:00-4:45 PM: Matt Perrier, Dalebanks Angus - Reproductive technologies that have changed the ranch

Nov 5th – Bull Session
1:00-1:45 PM: Dr. David Kenny, Teagasc - Bull development and its impacts on sperm
2:00-2:45 PM: Dr. Zach McFarlane, Cal. Poly - Bull nutrition for a successful herd sire
3:00-3:45 PM: Dr. Tom Geary, USDA-ARS - Bull fertility: nutritional effects and new measures
4:00-4:45 PM: Dr. George Perry, Texas A&M - The ultimate value of breeding soundness evaluations

Nov 5th – Veterinary Continuing Education Session *Open for all
5:15-6:00 PM: Dr. Paul Walz, Auburn Univ. - Vaccination to protect against reproductive disease
6:15-7:00 PM: Dr. Lee Jones, Univ. of Georgia - Investigating conception failures and pregnancy loss in beef cows
7:15-8:00 PM: Dr. Chance Armstrong, Louisiana State Univ. - Bull breeding soundness exam: What’s new?

www.beefrepro.org facebook.com/beefrepro
info@beefrepro.org @beef_repro
### RIVER VALLEY DISTRICT

#### “2020 UP-COMING MEETINGS & EVENTS”

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**Have a question? Contact us!**

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K-State Research and Extension is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision or hearing disability, or a dietary restriction please contact the Belleville office at 785-527-5084, the Clay Center office at 785-632-5335, the Concordia office at 785-243-8185, or the Washington office at 785-325-2121.