

Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference Goes Virtual

by Gayle Olson, MS, CHES, I-CASH Assistant to the Director

The theme for our 2020 Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference was well chosen – ***Rising to New Challenges***. It was our first ever 100% online conference, with 132 people from 14 states and 5 countries participating, and presenters came from as far away as Australia. According to the evaluations, which are still coming in, it was a great success!

Recognizing that people can't effectively focus on their computer screens for two solid days, we changed the format this year and included several different components.

- A virtual conference website served as the central meeting space. The website included general information, conference schedule, posters, pre-recorded presentations, and exhibits from our sponsors and partnering organizations.
- Live-streamed presentations via Zoom were featured each morning from 9 am - 12:30 pm on November 17-20. Our keynote speaker was Dr. Ali Khan from the University of Nebraska Medical Center with a presentation entitled *Emerging Zoonotic Diseases Impacting Agriculture: What Comes After Covid 19?* The capstone speaker was Dr. Rima Afifi from the University of Iowa College of Public Health, who taught us about *The Science of Communicating Effectively for Behavior Change*. Both presentations were followed by fantastic panel discussions, which were well received by conference participants.



MRASH panel discussion *Changing Behaviors with Changing Demographics* was presented via Zoom.

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- Additional topics covered at the conference were aging, youth safety, behavioral health, vulnerable populations, and livestock handling safety. Each day ended with discussion time for conference attendees to visit with the poster presenters and with those who did pre-recorded presentations. Three of the days featured short stretch or yoga breaks, with exercises appropriate for those sitting for hours in front of a computer screen, and also appropriate breaks for those sitting in a tractor or combine seat. Livestreamed sessions were recorded and included on the website. In addition, the traditional student career luncheon became a virtual coffee time, and was also appreciated.
- A conference box was mailed to all US addresses and included handouts that would normally be distributed at an on-site conference, swag from the exhibits, and Iowa-based snacks.
- A Facebook group provided a place to highlight the sessions, share photos and continue discussion.

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Director's Message

by Brandi Janssen, PhD

Every winter arrives with the expectation of hunkering down a bit, usually a welcome respite from the hectic growing season. At this point, of course, we've already been hunkering down and the thought of a long, cold winter spent socially distanced from loved ones may seem bleak, at best. In Iowa, and across the US, we continue to break records for daily COVID-19 cases and deaths, which means that our precautionary measures remain as important as ever as we wait for a vaccine.



Brandi Janssen, PhD

Early in the year, as we began planning for the MRASH conference, we were looking forward to convening in Independence, IA at the Heartland Acres Agribition Center. We knew by early summer that we would need to replan the event. As you can read about in this issue, we brought together over 130 participants from all over the globe for an online conference. One of the highlights of the conference is always the networking and catching up with colleagues. Although our online conference didn't allow us to gather around an exhibit booth or at a reception over an Iowa wine at the end of the day, we still had time to chat in online breakout rooms. We couldn't serve as much local food as we usually do, but we were able to include caramels from Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey in Dubuque, and Iowa-grown microwave popcorn in a mailed package of conference materials. The pandemic has changed a lot, but the high quality research and shared focus on keeping the agricultural workforce safe and healthy remained strong at MRASH.

The I-CASH team has shifted other important programming online this year. Since August, we've helped organize and conduct two respirator fit test training and one 6-hour training for Peer Support Specialists and Mental Health Providers about agricultural stress. You can read more about these events later in this issue. However, other traditional products have remained the same. We shipped out the 2021 I-CASH Farm Safety Calendar, our fourth annual, to all of our ISU Extension and Outreach and Farm Service Agency partners last month. Stop by your local office to pick up a copy (while wearing a mask or face covering, of course!)

We have some exciting projects just starting up as well. I-CASH received funding as part of the Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center, a 12-state collaborative that will create and expand stress management and mental health resources and services to agricultural producers and stakeholders in the North Central region. The project is led by Josie Rudolphi, a graduate of our Agricultural Safety and Health program, who is now an Assistant Professor in agricultural and biological engineering at the University of Illinois. I-CASH will work with David Brown, Behavioral Health Specialist at ISU Extension and Outreach to develop curricula for mental health providers related to agriculture. We are also looking forward to partnering with the National ROPS Rebate Program on a project to develop, implement, and evaluate a statewide media plan on the adoption of Rollover Protection Structure (ROPS) rebate programs. This five-year project is funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

As we wrap up a year that has been like no other, I hope you all have a restful holiday and Happy New Year. Here's to a healthy and safe 2021!

Dr. Brandi Janssen directs I-CASH, housed in the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health of the College of Public Health. She can be reached at 319/335-4190 (brandi-janssen@uiowa.edu).



The University of Iowa = Iowa State University
Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
Iowa Department of Public Health = Non-profits for Farm Health

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Holidays 2020: Recommendations to Prevent COVID-19 Spread

by Renée Anthony, PhD, CIH, CSP; Kate Crawford, PhD, MS; and Jenn Patterson, MLitt

Many are happy to see the end of 2020, but unfortunately, this winter the holidays bring increased risk of infection due to community spread of COVID-19. While we wait to learn of the impact of Thanksgiving travels on infections that are already straining our hospital system, the risk of infecting ourselves and our family and friends is the highest it has ever been.

We are all pretty tired of masking up and distancing ourselves from others, but as we have moved our Midwestern activities indoors as fall turns to cold winter, the spread of viral particles from exhaled breath of infected persons is a bigger threat than during warmer months when we could bring in fresh air to our homes.

The safest thing we can recommend is to limit in-person, indoor holiday celebrations to your immediate household members. Traveling, hosting visitors, sharing utensils, and occupying the same indoor space all increase the risk of spreading the virus. The big danger of the virus that causes COVID-19 is that those infected may infect others without even knowing it. If you are infected, you may not exhibit symptoms for up to 14 days, if at all.

It is important to understand what being a “close contact” is, because if you spend time with someone who tests positive for COVID, you will have to quarantine at home for 14 days. A close contact is identified if you were within 6 feet of someone infected with the virus for as little as 15 minutes, regardless of mask wearing. A close contact is at risk of developing COVID and spreading it to others, perhaps others who are more susceptible to deadly outcomes than you are. ([Learn more](#))

You should avoid attending in-person holiday gatherings if:

- you are at [increased risk](#) of developing severe illness from COVID-19,
- are experiencing any [symptoms](#),
- are waiting for test results or have had only one negative test result after a confirmed contact with someone who tested positive,
- have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

We have summarized some of the CDC’s [guidelines](#) to help inform your holiday planning below.

Avoid Even Small Gatherings

About 50% of COVID-19 cases in November were from transmission from people who didn’t know they were infected. Most cases were from *small* gatherings where recommended safe practices (masking, distancing, outdoors, short durations) were not followed.

The most effective way to prevent spreading the virus is to celebrate virtually with those outside your immediate household. Household members would be anyone who currently shares your living space – family members, roommates, or those who are in your “pod”. Please be aware that students coming home from college should NOT be considered part of their parents’ household, as they may be bringing COVID home with them. These students can pose risks of spreading the virus until the 14-day quarantine period has passed, so masking, physical distancing, and limited interaction indoors is recommended for their first 14 days at home.

It’s important to remember that indoor gatherings pose more risk than outdoor gatherings. Furthermore, longer gatherings pose more risk than shorter ones. If you do end up attending a small gathering, it’s important to understand that you’re increasing the risk of you or your loved ones getting sick. For example, if you’re within 6 feet of someone infected with the virus for a cumulative 15 minutes or more, you can still get sick even if you break up your event with shorter timeframes. Any exposure over 15 minutes requires a 14-day quarantine. ([Learn more](#))

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This Doesn't Mean You Have to Celebrate Alone

Being safe today does not mean being alone.

Technology can help bring people together. Computer and phone apps can help you see and talk to those you normally spend time with. You have probably heard of Zoom, Google chats, and Facetime. There are devices for sale this holiday season to help the “technologically disadvantaged” easily connect (Facebook’s Portal or Google’s Nest Hub). It is best to work out technology ahead of big days to make sure everyone is comfortable with the technology and identify how they want to interact on this new medium, especially if they haven’t been working or taking classes using these tools for months like many of us have.

But don’t forget about the phone. Set appointments to check in for family talks, and keep them. You CAN make these special and memorable if you plan ahead.

You can plan ahead to have boxes of photos or snacks of family recipes opened to share during these events. This may be the year that you write down family recipes and share with other households and test them all at the same time to find out “who made it best.” If you have holiday movies, shows, or sports you watch every year, make a date for a viewing party where everyone checks in by text or phone throughout. Again, with a little bit of planning, this can be a fun and memorable way to share important traditions – or make new ones. Practice to be familiar with what works on “less important” trial runs to minimize holiday pressure.

Here are a few links to some easy-to-read resources with helpful instructions on how to use different virtual communication platforms as well as fun ideas for using online virtual meeting spaces to share the holidays with people living outside your household:

- [How to Use Zoom \(AARP 2020\)](#)
- [Eight ways to celebrate a virtual Thanksgiving during COVID-19 \(Connecticut Children’s, 2020\)](#)
- [How to host a virtual game night \(UCHealth Today, 2020\)](#)
- [Is your college student bringing COVID home for the holidays? \(AARP 2020\)](#)

If you are still considering traveling (which your health care providers do not recommend), the CDC provides a [list of questions](#) you should consider before doing so to make the holiday season safer for you, your loved ones, and your community. The [holiday guidelines](#) also provide helpful information about making small gatherings safer. For instance, you can prepare and eat your own food, learn how to remove and safely store your mask while eating, clean and disinfect shared surfaces, and use single-use condiments and disposable cutlery. ([Learn more](#))

All of us at the GPCAH and I-CASH hope you all have a safe and fun holiday season. Make it memorable and take some time to reflect on the great opportunities ahead in 2021.

As always, visit gpcah.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more updates and tips.

Kate’s Virtual Thanksgiving Experience

(Kate Crawford, GPCAH Research Associate)

This year my husband and I stayed home for Thanksgiving and ate a small meal together. We did Zoom with my parents and my brother and his family, and it was nice to see everybody. My dad and I still got to talk about the football game that was on TV, and I made my mom’s pumpkin pie, and was able to show her how it turned out. My niece sang us all a song over Zoom, which she was really excited about. My in-laws do not have the internet, but they live fairly close, so we prepared some food for them and dropped it off on their porch and then just called them on the phone to catch up. It’s always nice to spend time with family on holidays, but it wasn’t worth the risk of getting our loved ones sick. We had a really nice and relaxing day, and it was wonderful just to talk to our family (and it was the first year we didn’t have to make three kinds of stuffing).

Jenn’s Stay-at-Home Thanksgiving

(Jenn Patterson, GPCAH Communications Coordinator)

My husband and I are both in the high-risk categories for developing COVID-19, so we committed to staying home with our son this year. We played board games and had a nice dinner. None of our parents is very tech savvy, so we just had extra-long phone calls this year. We’re trying to get them on board with using an online meeting app for Christmas. I’ll definitely share these resources (left) with all of my family members.

Educating Rural Mental Health Providers about Agricultural Stress

by Brandi Janssen, PhD

It's no secret in the agricultural community that stress and mental health need to be priority issues. There are numerous challenges for farmers and other rural residents who are trying to access mental health services, including provider shortages, lack of insurance coverage, and stigma seeking help. One way to make counseling services more acceptable to farmers is to ensure that rural providers have some basic knowledge of agriculture and the occupational stressors that farmers face.



To help address this issue, I-CASH director Brandi Janssen worked with Diane Brenneman, Training Director for Stead Family Children's Hospital, Pediatric Division of Child and Community Health, David Brown, Behavioral Health Specialist at ISU Extension and Outreach, and Josh Gitch and Emily Berry, both Peer Support Specialists with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to plan a six-hour training for Peer Support Specialists and mental health providers on the stresses in agriculture.

The day included presentations from Dr. Brown and Dr. Janssen, as well as ISU Extension Dairy Specialist Larry Tranel on agricultural stress. A panel of farmers (Norlin Mommsen, Steve Gingerich, Josh Gitch and Diane Brenneman) talked about their day-to-day experiences farming, including broken manure spreaders, interactions with input dealers, and financial challenges. Participants also learned strategies to reach out to farmers and how Peer Support Specialists could work with other providers in their areas.

Fifty-nine people attended the event, 24 were Peer Support Specialists; they were able to earn six Continuing Education Credits for their attendance. Those who participated reported that the event was valuable, noting that "being able to hear from the panel of farmers was incredibly useful." Another stated, "learning about the various ways to approach the farming community" was the most useful part of the day for them.

Reducing stress in agricultural communities is a complicated process. We will continue to work with rural mental health providers to ensure that they are well prepared to serve farmers and their families.

Additional farm stress resources can be found on the [I-CASH website](#).

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Kudos for the conference's success go to the MRASH Planning Team representing many Midwestern NIOSH Ag Centers and ag safety and health organizations. None of it would have been possible without the excellent planning advice and support of the College of Public Health technology team. Our session hosts and presenters all did a great job of adapting to the format and provided a wealth of leading edge research, practical information and helpful resources. Our sponsors and exhibitors were generous with their contributions to the conference box and donations that enabled free registration for students and essential workers. A huge thank you to everyone involved!

The MRASH planning team has already determined that next year's conference will either be a virtual or hybrid conference. That means another year where anyone in the world can submit an abstract or attend the conference. We are already looking at ways to increase the networking activities for those who can only attend virtually. Watch for more information next spring.



Expanding Respirator Fit Test Resources

by Brandi Janssen, PhD

Pesticide Applicator Training sessions are an annual ritual for ISU Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), where applicators learn about both safety and policy. Changes to the EPA's Worker Protection Standard (WPS) in 2015, which went into effect in 2017, require respirator fit testing for people who apply certain pesticides. Meaghan Anderson, ISUEO Field Agronomist, says, "An important part of training pesticide applicators is to inform them of policy changes that impact the way they use and apply pesticides."

In 2017, ISUEO and IDALS worked with Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH), the Department of Public Health, and WORKSAFE, Iowa to develop a list of respirator fit testing services across the state. However, it was soon evident that there were shortages, especially in western and central Iowa, and that farmers and applicators were having difficulty finding someone to conduct a fit test for them. Anderson says, "We often received questions about how the fit test process works and where to get fit tested."

Earlier this year, I-CASH advisory board member and Pesticide Applicator Training manager Kristine Schaefer raised the issue and connected me with the ISU field agronomists to figure out how we could solve this problem. We reached out to Carolyn Sheridan, executive director of the Ag Health and Safety Alliance, who is an experienced fit test trainer and has developed a fit test curriculum that included information about respiratory hazards in agriculture, the Worker Protection Standard requirements, and the technical details of how to conduct a respirator fit test. We quickly knew that I-CASH could provide the fit test kits, Carolyn could conduct the trainings, and ISUEO would help with promotion. However, we didn't know exactly who would be interested in taking the trainings and we weren't sure how to deliver them, given the COVID-19 pandemic that had most of us working from home.

Although Carolyn had never conducted the training in an online format, she was willing to try it out. Part of the training requires the participants to demonstrate to the trainer that they know how to use the fit test kit and are confident using it to test someone with their respirator. Using Zoom, she felt confident she could work with trainees online so that they completed the training fully ready to fit test members of their communities.

We reached out to the regional public health directors, asking if their county staff would be interested in learning how to fit test. The response was quick and very positive. Many had been getting questions about respirators from across their communities, as care facilities and schools were wondering about respirators as a part of their COVID-19 protocols. In addition, many ISUEO staff members were also enthusiastic about learning how to fit test. As Meaghan Anderson points out, extension "has always been an important resource for farmers. It is a natural fit that we can provide the service of fit testing to farmers in rural communities across the state."

After all of this, two trainings were offered this fall that included county public health personnel and extension staff. We now have an additional 33 individuals trained in 23 counties, significantly expanding availability for some of our most underserved areas. Sioux, Ida, Calhoun, Poweshiek, Tama and Keokuk counties are just a few of those where fit testing is newly available. A full list of fit test resources can be found at www.i-cash.org.

The new requirements of the WPS took some farmers and applicators by surprise. Similarly, the lack of fit testing options in Iowa took many of us in public health by surprise. We are lucky in Iowa to have so many agencies focused on ensuring the health, safety, and productivity of our agricultural workforce. Meaghan Anderson sums it up, "I appreciate how we were able to bring a network together so quickly to train a group safely during a pandemic, this will benefit rural communities for years to come."

A longer version of this article was originally published in [Iowa Farmer Today](#).



Carolyn Sheridan of the Ag Health and Safety Alliance conducts a respirator fit test training session via Zoom.

NEWS AND UPDATES

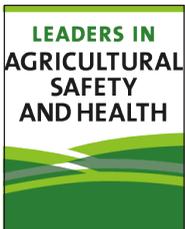
I-CASH Agricultural Youth Grant applications are now available.

Each year I-CASH provides funds for community grants to youth groups aimed at the prevention of farm-related injury. In addition, I-CASH awards an Outstanding Youth Grant Award and the winners are invited to present their project at the annual MRASH Conference. Past projects have included distributing safety supplies such as ear plugs and sun screen, building farm safety hazard displays, and developing agricultural safety materials and presentations. **Applications are due April 15th.** Visit www.i-cash.org for details.



Private pesticide applicator course information update.

Due to COVID-19, the private pesticide applicator Continuing Instruction Course (P-CIC) program will have additional recertification options. Applicators have until April 15, 2021, to attend a P-CIC program. Check with your county extension office or their [website](#) for information on programs they will provide. Additional testing information is available at <https://iowaagriculture.gov/pesticide-bureau/pesticide-applicator-testing>.



SAVE THE DATE

Agricultural Safety and Health: The Core Course will be held June 14-18, 2021. The course will be held virtually and include synchronous and asynchronous content and activities. Course details will be available at www.gpcch.org.



The I-CASH 2021 Farm Safety Calendars are available at ISU Extension and Outreach, and FSA county offices. The calendars feature safety and health tips and showcase Iowa's farm landscapes.



Upcoming Events

January 21-23

Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference
Virtual Event

February 9-11

World Ag Expo Online
Virtual Event

March 22-24

North American Agricultural Safety Summit
Virtual Event

April 5-9

Public Health Conference of Iowa
Virtual Event

April 15

I-CASH Youth Grant deadline

May 4-7

National Rural Health Association Annual Rural Health Conference
New Orleans, LA

May 24-26

American Industrial Hygiene Conference & Exposition
Dallas, TX

June 14-18

Agricultural Safety and Health: The Core Course
Virtual Event

June 20-25

International Society for Agricultural Safety and Health (ISASH) Conference
Asheville, NC



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