



4-H Participant Age Policy

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

About Timelines



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This document is designed to answer some of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) about the age policy that will go into effect for Michigan 4-H Youth Development on September 1, 2004.

Q. My county 4-H program is ready to implement the new age policy in fall 2003. Is that allowed?

A. Yes. The Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy takes effect September 1, 2004. Counties can decide to implement this policy as early as September 1, 2003, but all counties **must** have made the change by September 1, 2004.

A transition year is being put into place to allow counties to assist their volunteers and members in better understanding the change in the 4-H Participant Age Policy. The flexibility that this offers

means that the county can calculate the 4-H age to best meet the needs of their members for the 2003-04 year. For example, if a county wishes to allow the use of the December 31, 2004, date and the January 1, 2004, date to get everyone comfortable with the new policy, that is their option. If the county wants to adopt one or the other of the policies for this year, that, too, is the county's decision. After this year, the new policy will go into effect on September 1, 2004, with a 4-H member's age determined by his or her age on January 1 of the 4-H program year.

About Implementation—The Nuts & Bolts

Q. What programs do the Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy for 5- to 8-year-olds apply to?

A. The policy applies to all Michigan State University Extension 4-H Youth Development programming that is developed for 5- to 8-year-old members, including programs, events and activities.

Q. What is the group name for 5- to 8-year-old 4-H'ers?

A. Michigan 4-H Youth Development allows the members of 4-H clubs and groups to name their own 4-H clubs and groups. Michigan 4-H Youth Development offers program opportunities for specific participant age groups. Only one of those groups, the 5- to 8-year-olds, has a specific name: "4-H Cloverbuds." If a county chooses to use a different name for the 5- to 8-year-old age group (such as Junior 4-H'ers or Explorers), the county still must follow the 4-H Participant Age policy for 5- to 8-year olds.

Q. What should 5- to 8-year-olds enter as their project area when they complete county 4-H enrollment forms?

A. When 4-H'ers aged 5 to 8 complete county 4-H enrollment forms, they should indicate that their project is **FD: Introductory 4-H Projects**. This is the category used to record 5- to 8-year-olds' involvement in Extension programs on the federal ES-237 statistical report. Counties may use additional tracking methods in the Blue Ribbon software program to record 4-H Cloverbud members' specific interest areas.

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About Age Ranges

Q. When can a young person first become a 4-H member?

A. After September 1, 2004, youth must be aged 5 or older by January 1 of the 4-H program year when they complete their first 4-H enrollment form.

Q. Our county's program for younger 4-H'ers starts at age 7, not age 5. How does this policy affect us?

A. Each county MSU Extension program can determine the beginning and ending ages for 4-H involvement within that county. However, the starting age can go no lower than the 4-H age of 5. For example, a county 4-H program can choose to program for 7- to 19-year-olds, rather than for 5- to 19-year-olds. The 4-H Cloverbud or 5- to 8-year-old participant policy is still in effect, and 4-H'ers still move from the 4-H Cloverbud experiences into 4-H experiences for 9- to 19-year-olds when they reach the 4-H age of 9.

Q. Our county's program has an upper age limit of 18. How does this policy affect us?

A. Again, counties can determine ending ages as long as that age does not exceed age 19.

Q. The policy talks about "developmentally appropriate practices" and "age-appropriate practices." What do these terms mean?

A. In practical terms, "developmentally appropriate practices" and "age-appropriate practices" mean that 4-H experiences for youth—wherever the young people fall on the age spectrum between 4-H age 5 and 4-H age 19—must be designed with respect for the physical, social, cognitive (thinking) and emotional development of the youth.

Q. In our county, many young people don't get started in 4-H until they're older than the 4-H Cloverbud years—sometimes not until they're teens. We like to keep these young people involved as members into their early 20s. How does this policy affect our county 4-H program?

A. The ending age for involvement as 4-H members is the 4-H age of 19. Counties with older youth who wish to continue their 4-H involvement after that age are encouraged to move them into volunteer roles to continue their 4-H involvement and to help them build age-appropriate leadership skills.

About Awards, Competition & Recognition

Q. How does this policy affect the state 4-H awards system?

A. 4-H'ers are eligible to enter the competitive state 4-H awards program when they reach 4-H age 14. Youth are allowed to participate in the state 4-H awards program through the year they are 4-H age 19.

Q. How does this policy affect competitive events?

A. No 4-H members under the 4-H age of 9 should be involved with **competitive** events as a part of their 4-H experience. The year in which a 4-H member is age 9 or older on January 1 of the 4-H program year, he or she may transition to 4-H experiences for 9- to 19-year-olds, which include competitive events.

Q. How can 5- to 8-year-olds participate in shows and exhibitions?

A. Participation, safety, personal development and learning are the highest priorities for involvement in 4-H. The following policies are instituted to ensure that 4-H members remain safe and have positive, developmentally appropriate experiences in 4-H.

Five- to 8-year-old 4-H members may participate in general exhibitions about their 4-H experiences that are designed specifically for this age group. These are noncompetitive (that is, they are not judged, ranked or placed). Age-appropriate exhibits can include but are not limited to posters, stories, scrapbooks, and still and live project displays (with

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one-on-one adult supervision). 4-H Cloverbuds may not participate in competitive classes, sales, treaties and auctions at 4-H events.

Michigan 4-H Youth Development offers a variety of resources to help volunteers and staff members create more age-appropriate programming environments for young people aged 5 to 8. For more information visit <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/5to8year/index.html>.

Q. What types of recognition for 4-H members are appropriate under the terms of the 4-H Participant Age Policy?

A. It's important that 4-H Cloverbuds (aged 5 to 8) be recognized equally for their participation in 4-H events and activities. "Placings" are not appropriate for this age group.

4-H'ers aged 9 to 19 may participate in competitive and noncompetitive 4-H events, and may receive recognition – in a variety of forms – for their efforts. The Michigan 4-H Recognition Model encourages counties to develop a comprehensive

system that recognizes members for all aspects of their 4-H experience. This model suggests ways to recognize youth for participation, progress toward self-set goals, standards of excellence, cooperation and peer competition. Many counties use the project medal system to recognize youth participation in specific project activities before they enter the state 4-H awards system. For more information on the Michigan 4-H Recognition Model, visit <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/downloads/recognitionhandbook.pdf>.

Q. Can 4-H Cloverbuds participate in the competitive open youth division classes at our county fair?

A. Parents and guardians of children aged 5 to 8 may choose to allow their children to participate in competitive classes and events **that are not part of 4-H** at the county fair. These events and this participation **can not** be done under the name or emblem of 4-H Youth Development, and youth can not be recognized as 4-H members as part of their participation in these events.

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“Participation, safety, personal development and learning are the highest priorities for involvement in 4-H.”

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About Inclusion, Discrimination & Insurance

Q. How does the age policy affect 4-H'ers with disabilities?

A. 4-H members with and without disabilities may participate in 4-H beginning at 4-H age 5. 4-H'ers with disabilities may continue as 4-H'ers regardless of their upper age with special permission from their county 4-H staff. (Note that Michigan law stipulates that a student with a disability is entitled to continue in a special education program of service until the end of the school year in which he or she reaches age 26.)

Michigan 4-H Youth Development offers a variety of resources to help volunteers and staff members create more inclusive programming environments for young people with disabilities. For more information visit <http://www.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/inclusive/index.html>. You may also find additional resources for creating developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for children with disabilities by contacting your local or intermediate school district.

Q. Might counties face the risk of having age discrimination complaints lodged against them if they do not recognize the 5- to 8-year-old participant age group in their county 4-H programs?

A. MSU Extension allows counties to determine programming to meet the local needs and resources available in the county. Having said that, counties must not allow:

- Youth who are younger than age 5 by January 1 of the 4-H programming year to participate in 4-H.
- Youth who are younger than age 9 to participate in competitive events.
- Youth who are older than age 19 to participate as 4-H members.

Within these broad guidelines, county 4-H programs and state 4-H program teams must take into account youth safety and developmental



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appropriateness when making participant age decisions for 4-H programs, events and activities.

Q. What are the insurance implications of this policy?

A. Michigan State University provides liability coverage for volunteers and staff who operate

within the stated policies and guidelines of Michigan 4-H Youth Development. Parents or guardians of 4-H'ers may want to secure personal health or accident insurance coverage for their children's participation. County MSU Extension staff members can help identify insurance options.



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For More Information

Q. Where can I find out more about the 4-H Participant Age Policy and age-appropriate 4-H programming?

A. A complete copy of the 4-H Participant Age Policy is available on the Web at <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/downloads/4-H-Age-Policy.pdf>. You can find more information, resources and learning materials for programming with youth in age-appropriate ways on the Web at:

- 5- to 8-year-olds – <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/5to8year.html>
- 9- to 13-year-olds – <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/earlyad.html>
- 14- to 19-year-olds – <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/olderyou.html>

For general information on age-appropriate youth development practices, visit <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyf/youth/ageapp.html>.

For more information about the 4-H Participant Age Policy contact your county MSU Extension office found on the Web at <http://www.msue.msu.edu>

or:

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