



Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy Frequently Asked Questions



FOR THE 4-H PROGRAM YEAR BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 1, 2018, AND BEYOND.

ABOUT AGE RANGES

Q. WHEN CAN A YOUNG PERSON FIRST BECOME A 4-H MEMBER?

A. Youth must be aged 5 or older by January 1 of the 4-H program year (September 1 – August 31) when they enroll in 4-H. At age 8, youth move from the 4-H Cloverbud experience into 4-H experiences for 8- to 19-year-olds. However, age appropriateness and safety are key considerations for 4-H programming areas. This means certain learning environments may not be appropriate for children 8 years of age, thus minimum age limits for some areas that exceed 8 years of age.

Q. OUR COUNTY'S PROGRAM DOES NOT START AT AGE 5. ARE THEY IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE MICHIGAN 4-H PARTICIPANT AGE POLICY?

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 and the ending age can go no higher than 19 (with the exception of youths with disabilities). For example, a county 4-H program can choose to program for 7- to 18-year-olds, rather than for 5- to 19-year-olds. The 4-H Cloverbud or 5- to 7-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 8- to 19-year-olds when they reach the 4-H age of 8.

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.

Age appropriateness and safety are key considerations for 4-H programming areas. This means certain learning environments may not be appropriate for children of all ages, thus minimum age limits have been set for some programming areas.

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 13. 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 8 should be involved with **competitive** events as a part of their 4-H experience. The year in which a 4-H member is age 8 or older on January 1 of the 4-H program year, he or she may transition to 4-H experiences for 8- to 19-year-olds, which includes competitive events.

Q. HOW CAN 5- TO 7-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 guidelines are instituted to ensure that 4-H members remain safe and have positive, developmentally appropriate experiences in 4-H.

Five- to 7-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 one-on-one adult supervision). 4-H Cloverbuds may not participate in competitive classes, sales, treaties and auctions at 4-H events. See the [4-H Cloverbud Learning Guidelines](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/resources/michigan_4_h_cloverbud_learning_guidelines) document at http://msue.anr.msu.edu/resources/michigan_4_h_cloverbud_learning_guidelines for additional information.

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 7) be recognized equally for their participation in 4-H events and activities. "Placings" are not appropriate for this age group.

4-H'ers aged 8 to 19 may participate in competitive and noncompetitive 4-H events, and may receive recognition – in a variety of forms – for their efforts. Michigan 4-H encourages counties to develop a comprehensive system that recognizes members for all aspects of their 4-H experience, including 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.

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 7 may choose to allow their children to participate in competitive classes and events **that are not part of 4-H** at the county fair or other sponsored events (horse shows, jackpot shows, etc.). These events and this participation cannot be done under the name or emblem of 4-H Youth Development, and youth cannot be recognized as 4-H members as part of their participation in these events.





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, contact your county 4-H program coordinator. 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 7-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 8 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 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. In addition, all 4-H members and volunteers enrolled in the state enrollment program, 4-H Online, are covered by a statewide supplemental accident insurance policy through American Income Life.





FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the 4-H Participant Age Policy, view it online at http://msue.anr.msu.edu/resources/michigan_4_h_participant_age_policy1 contact your county MSU Extension office found on the web at <http://msue.anr.msu.edu/county> or:

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