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Coping with COVID project compiles perspectives on pandemic public health protocols in our daily lives

October 1, 2020

People are invited to share reflections and perspectives on how their everyday lives have been affected by public health guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic in a new project led by a University of Maine researcher.

The project will compile photos, videos and stories that offer a glimpse into how people have adjusted their everyday lives to accommodate recommendations like social distancing, mask-wearing and self-monitoring. In addition to submitting their own reflections, participants are encouraged to explore the submissions of others from across the United States and Canada who are working with COVID-19 public health guidelines into their own routines.

Swacha's goal in the Coping with COVID project is to interrogate some of the public health conversations surrounding the pandemic, providing public voice to everyday lived experiences negotiating those conversations and public health recommendations. How are people negotiating COVID-related health guidelines with other factors of their everyday lives?

“Understanding how people use public health information in their everyday lives can provide public health communicators with key insights into how to more effectively communicate that information,” Swacha says. “It is one thing to see a flyer at your doctor’s office that tells you to wear a mask and think ‘yeah, that makes sense,’ try to do that,” Swacha says. “It’s another thing to follow that recommendation as you move through your daily life — to keep 6 feet from a family member who you haven’t seen in months, for example, or to remember to wear your mask every time you open your front door to greet a neighbor.”

The project uses a participatory method, in which study participants become more actively involved in the research process and the data collected. The study asks people to provide photos, videos, or other media that tell their story because images, videos, and stories can provide a window into people’s daily experiences that might not show up through more traditional qualitative research methods like interviews or focus groups.

Coping with COVID seeks participants widely, from Maine as well as across the country and in Canada, so that researchers might better understand how people navigate geographic location, cultural and political context, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic position and other factors affect how they interpret and act on public health recommendations.

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Through its specific focus on how public health recommendations are impacting daily life, the project is distinct from, yet complements other COVID-related humanities projects currently underway. These include, for example, UMaine’s Jack Pine Project and Maine Memory Network’s My Maine Stories, which are important projects that gather and facilitate historical, therapeutic, and arts-based responses to the pandemic.

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