

Supporting Local Nurseries and Garden Centers in Mitigating the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, had a significant impact on local businesses, including nurseries and garden centers, as well as public health. Many local nurseries and garden centers faced challenges related to supply chain disruptions, shifts in customer preferences, and the implementation of safety procedures. However, limited research has been conducted on how the pandemic influenced public behavior and perception, as most studies have focused on its broader effects. To address this gap, we conducted surveys to assess public knowledge of COVID-19 variants, vaccination status, and purchasing preferences in garden centers and retail operations. The survey was also used as an approach to remind the public about COVID-19 and its impact.

In 2024, data were collected from 240 participants. Among them, 29.7% were fully vaccinated, 22.9% were aware of the KP.3 variant as the most recent strain, and only 10.2% were aware of long-term COVID-19 symptoms. Notably, 78.4% of respondents affirmed the importance of preventive measures, such as handwashing and avoiding close contact. Additionally, we observed a shift in consumer behavior, with an increased preference for online ordering and curbside pickup.

In These results highlight the importance of enhanced public health messaging, particularly in addressing vaccine hesitancy, adapting retail strategies in the agricultural and nursery industries, and increasing awareness of Long COVID and its complications. Understanding how people adapt in agricultural and retail environments can help businesses and health authorities develop strategies to improve future pandemic preparedness and response. This project was supported by USDA-NIFA Award Number #: 2020-69008-32761.