



Parent Questions About Summer Camps Amid Covid-19 Restrictions And The Answers They Should Listen For

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Camps everywhere are facing the difficult decision of whether to open this summer. For those that do, parents of campers need to decide if attendance is right for their family. Some families will choose to provide an alternative experience at home, while others may not have this option or may value the camp experience highly enough to attend. Still, it is normal to want more information than usual this year.

This fact sheet is designed to help orient parents to some of the main factors to consider regarding summer camp during the coronavirus pandemic. Parents should never feel badly about being apprehensive or asking their camp for details about their program and their health and safety practices; a good camp will welcome these questions. National bodies like the American Camping Association (ACA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and State and local agencies are providing camps with guidance during these uncertain times.¹ Since all camps are unique, they are integrating this guidance in different ways. Additionally, conditions will continue to evolve throughout the summer, so parents should continue to research national, state, and local guidance and stay in touch with their camps as their session approaches.

What is known about the risks to children of the novel coronavirus?

Far fewer children than adults have become infected with the novel coronavirus, however the number continues to rise as testing expands.² Scientists know less about COVID-19 in children than they do about adults and are continuing to conduct research.³ Children tend to exhibit more mild symptoms than adults, although common symptoms are similar. Critical illness appears to be rarer in children than adults with more children than adults appearing asymptomatic.⁴ This means that the risk of children spreading the virus to adults (including parents and grandparents) currently outweighs the risk of spreading it to other children. As with adults, respiratory droplets are the main source by which the virus spreads.⁵

Medical Conditions

Underlying conditions that seem to complicate COVID in both children and adults include asthma, diabetes, blood disorders, and kidney disease (particularly involving dialysis). Parents are probably also familiar with recent stories of Multi-System Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). This risk is currently considered to be low, but parents should be aware of the symptoms.⁶

Contact with Animals

Emerging evidence suggests that coronavirus can be spread from people to certain animals, including cats, hamsters, and dogs. This risk is generally considered to be low. As of May 14, there is no evidence indicating horses can contract COVID-19 or spread the disease to people or to other animals.⁷

Swimming/Beaches

Some findings are suggesting that freshwater recreational areas (such as lakes and ponds) may pose a slight risk; this is an issue scientists are continuing to study.⁸ As long as swimming pools are well-maintained, chlorine kills the virus. Windy conditions may dilute the virus or spread it through the air; wind and weather conditions during outdoor activities are an emerging research area.⁹

Questions parents should consider asking their camps?

Questions for Camp

What You Should Listen For

On pre-camp planning

What kind of guidelines have you been using in your pre-camp planning?

How will you communicate any changes to me as your plans evolve?

Camps should be following guidance from organizations such as the ACA, YMCA, State agencies, or the CDC. Camps should also be planning on increasing their communication to families as camp sessions approach.

On minimizing transmission

What are you doing to minimize transmission both from outside camp and within camp during sessions?

What are your policies pertaining to out-of-state and international campers and staff?

How are you managing changeover days?

To what extent will people be coming and going from camp once it opens?

How will you accomplish social distancing?

How will you be cleaning and disinfecting camp facilities and equipment?

What hygiene practices will you be adopting?

Will you be using/requiring/providing PPE?

If campers interact regularly with animals, how is animal health being monitored?

There should be a thoughtful plan which may include things like reducing camp capacity, shortening/modifying the operating period, limiting transitions in and out of camp, canceling field trips, keeping campers in small groups for meals and activities, rearranging sleeping bunks, and so on.

Camps should be able to articulate their strategy for prioritizing frequent hygiene and disinfection for campers and staff. Specific practices should align with recommendations from the ACA, CDC, etc.

On monitoring camper health

How will you be monitoring camper health?

How will you be assessing campers for possible infection?

How frequently will campers and staff be tested?

What will you do if campers or staff become symptomatic?

Is your camp equipped to protect higher risk campers or adults?

Camps should have a communicable disease emergency action plan that covers topics like facilities for isolation of individuals, medical treatment, and communication with families if illness arises or protocols change. Camps should be able to explain who will be conducting testing (for example, a private lab). They should also have a backup plan if a staff member needs to quarantine.

On changes to daily routines and activities

What kinds of changes to daily routines and activities can my child expect?

What about camper drop-off and pick-up; visitors; food service and mealtimes; housing and sleeping; bathroom use; use of indoor spaces (e.g., rainy day plans); waterfront, sports, and hobby activities?

Example of best practices - 6' rule, head to toe bunks, physical barriers, reduced capacity, increasing ventilation, assigning campers dedicated equipment, cleaning equipment after each use, explaining risks of water or airborne transmission to campers. Only families can answer for themselves if plans strike a good balance between protecting campers and providing a quality camp experience.

On preparing for camp at home

As a parent, should I have my child tested or should I check for symptoms before camp?

Do you expect testing to be available before camp opens? If so, will you require my child to be tested?

What symptoms should I be monitoring at home, and how often should I check before camp?

Will quarantine be expected of out-of-state campers and staff members upon arrival?

Children should not attend camp if they are sick or showing possible symptoms.

Camps should inform parents of their responsibility in this area.

Camps should have screening policies and practices in place both before and during camp. This may involve testing or diagnosing clinically (based on symptoms).

Questions for Camp

What You Should Listen For

On how camp will handle illnesses

What happens if my child becomes sick at camp?

Is your policy to isolate and treat children at camp, or to send them home?

How will you be treating illnesses when they arise?

Which hospitals/facilities are available in the area, should my child require medical care?

Have staff been trained to recognize potential symptoms of MIS-C and to call for immediate medical help?

If children are only mildly unwell, can they still participate in camp activities?

Camps should have a plan in place for treating different levels of illness, including providing hospital locations and communicating with parents about campers' care as it progresses.

During the 2009 H1N1 outbreak, some camps provided alternative programming for symptomatic campers, enabling them to remain at camp (not all are able to do this).

Some guidelines are suggesting a return to camp might be possible after a home recovery. Camps should be able to describe such contingency plans.

What financial or logistical considerations should parents bear in mind?

Questions for Camp

What You Should Listen For

On refunds, scholarships, communication

How are you handling refunds?

Do you have any assistance available for families facing new financial hardships?

How should I, as a parent, prepare for camp this year?

If I decide not to send my child, how do you recommend helping ease their disappointment?

If I decide not to send my child to camp, will you issue a refund? Is there a deadline for me to request a refund? Do refunds apply to the deposits as well?

If my child is sent home early, will you give a partial refund?

How can I apply for a scholarship if I need it this year?

Should I plan on being available to pick up my child if they need to come home? Can someone else pick them up if necessary?

Camp policies regarding refunds will vary, but many are trying to provide flexibility as they understand the situation will evolve throughout the summer. Parents should do their best to work with the options their camp is providing.

If families are facing new financial hardships, they shouldn't hesitate to press camps about refunds or ask about scholarships. Camps' communication plans will depend on parents being available during camp; camps can advise on their expectations.

Children will likely be disappointed if they can't attend camp. Camps should offer some suggestions on how to help, and additional resources can be found in the endnotes.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹The full ACA/YMCA guidelines are available here: <https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/coronavirus/camp-business/camp-operations-guide-summer-2020>. CDC guidelines can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/Camps-Decision-Tree.pdf>. As of this writing, NH has not issued state guidelines yet.

²As of May 27, 65,139 children ages 0-19 have contracted COVID-19 in the U.S., with 391 ICU admits and 342 deaths (<https://www.covkidproject.org/>). Comparing figures is inexact since some data sources track 0-19 and others track 0-17.

³While the number of tests on children under 18 years old is low (<5% of all specimens tested in U.S. labs), the percentage testing positive for SARS-CoV-2 in children has either trended upward or remained stable in recent weeks (declining rates among adults have been observed during this time period. Studies in Europe show similarly low rates; only 2.1% of all laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases reported in Europe were in the age group between 0 and 14 years of age. Scientists are continuing to learn more about childhood transmission as more tests and pediatric studies are conducted. (Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>).

⁴<https://dontforgetthebubbles.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-data-top-10.pdf>, dated April 22.

⁵<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>

⁶For information for parents <https://www.cdc.gov/kawasaki/index.html>

⁷<https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2020/03/14/equine-coronavirus-covid-19-no-evidence-horse-human-spread>

⁸Giuseppina La Rosa, Lucia Bonadonna, Luca Lucentini, Sebastien Kenmoe, Elisabetta Suffredini (2020). Coronavirus in water environments: Occurrence, persistence and concentration methods - A scoping review. *Water Research*: 179, ISSN 0043-1354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.watres.2020.115899>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S004313542030436X>; The Water Research Foundation: <https://www.waterrf.org/event/coronavirus-research-update>; <https://www.waterrf.org/event/virtual-international-water-research-summit-covid-19>;

⁹<https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20200409/beaches-lakes-pools-is-covid-in-the-water>

¹⁰Link to 4-H sheet and other sources: <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/how-can-i-help-my-child-process-feelings-disappointment>; <https://childmind.org/article/how-to-help-your-kids-handle-disappointment/>; <https://nyulangone.org/news/schools-out-parents-guide-meeting-challenge-during-covid-19-pandemic>



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