

LOCAL REGULATORY ADVOCACY FOR CAMPS DURING COVID-19 IN 2021

States will again set parameters for when and how camps may operate in 2021. States set the large parameters for this response, but local decisions and implementation are the final steps. This calls for a different type of advocacy, especially in the local area where camps who choose to operate are relying on their own actions and messages of influence with regulatory bodies. The advocacy should not be based on an economic argument, but a goal to seek a path to opening in a safe and effective partnership with regulatory agents. This past summer many camps were able to operate successfully and safely by following guidelines set by, and working in partnership with, their local health departments.

Due to the novelty of COVID-19, the guidelines set by regulatory agencies were necessarily rigorous. Due to the timing of the progression of the pandemic, the guidelines issued also came at the worst possible time in the season for camps. Thanks to camps that did run, there are important lessons learned about safe operations and good examples to which to point. Additionally, more is now known about transmission of the disease, and the vaccination and testing environment is likely to be improved by next season.

We recognize that many local Departments of Health may not understand the timeline for camp preparation. For camps looking ahead to summer 2021, we are recommending camps engage directly with the local health department now. Collectively, camps should help them understand the planning timeline as well as the new protocols and practices camps are putting in place in order to be an effective, flexible public health partner. Camps encourage them to provide guidelines in a timely manner that are updated and revised as necessary reflecting the additional body of knowledge available. Individually, camps should be sharing their COVID-19 response plans and establishing agreements around communication and collaboration this summer.



Preparation/Do Your Homework

Know the basics about COVID-19. Emphasize that camps are generally outdoor environments. Emphasize pediatric environments, ease of cohorting, masking, and symptom screening.

- Review all state and local jurisdiction orders, guidance, and prescriptive guidelines related to camp and its operation. Remember they may be updated regularly. Understand which of these has priority. A state order often affords the opportunity for a local jurisdiction to be stricter.
- Compare camp guidance to existing camp regulations. Review any distinctive differences between guidance for operating during COVID-19 with traditional regulations. What additional measures will a camp be required to implement? How will a camp be held accountable and to which agencies?
- Compile a list of camper parents, friends of camp, and alumni who might be useful to help carry your message to your regulatory body. Where can they be the most helpful?
- Review ACA data on what happened in 2020 — only 60 percent of day camps and 18 percent of overnight camps operated in 2020.
- Do your homework before engaging in dialogue.

Organize

- Talk to other camps in your county/jurisdiction. Share questions, concerns, and proposed action.
- Agree on a common strategy and messaging if possible. A collective voice from the camp industry will have a higher impact than individual voices. Where there are individual voices, it is critical to consider consistent talking points with others and a similar ask.
- Whenever you can identify someone with a direct relationship to decision makers, it will increase your chance of getting an audience. Work with other camps to scan for existing relationships within the Governor's office and the State Department of Health. Sometimes key relationships with state representatives can be helpful as well. Also look for relationships within your local jurisdiction. Be positive in your approach and careful not to set up an adversarial relationship!

Engage

- Approach your local environmental health officer and/or public health officer directly to start building relationships and keep your local supervisor/elected official informed of your action.
- Be ready with your “ask” — what do you specifically want to be allowed to do?
- Be ready with an explanation/demonstration of how you feel you can meet the points on the guidance safely. Bring a detailed communicable disease plan for their input. Ultimately, they will need to agree with and have confidence in how you will manage any instance of communicable disease that you may have at camp this summer.
- Be ready with the history of why you feel you are equipped to handle this new challenge.
- Be ready to negotiate — be flexible but know your limits. Determine the conditions that you can or cannot implement in your situation. Ask about expectations on timing and mode of communication with them this summer.
- Be sure to stress that no matter what happens, camps are ready and eager to be at the table. Camps recognize that the scope and impact of the pandemic may (will) change over the next eight months and are willing to be flexible.
- Share the importance of the camp planning cycle to a camp’s readiness and the need for timeliness in directives.
 - Camper enrollments begin in the fall of the previous year and continue into the spring.
 - ◆ Deposits and tuitions paid
 - ◆ Collection of physician-signed health forms
 - ◆ Families schedules set
 - Seasonal staff hiring begins in the fall of the previous year and continues into the spring.
 - ◆ Commitments for future employment made
 - ◆ Mandated background checks performed
 - ◆ Trainings completed and certifications obtained
 - Facility maintenance is a year-round process for often large complexes, which can include dozens of buildings.
 - ◆ Facility preparation is not only ongoing but a huge job that starts months prior to opening day. This includes cabins, lodges, and program areas such as swimming pools, waterfronts, stables, sports fields, etc., in order to open in time for the summer.
 - Program work is also a year-round process.
 - ◆ Many aspects of providing a program such as vehicle rentals, horse leases, and public lands permits must be completed in the fall
 - ◆ Purchasing of new equipment for program occurs during the winter and early spring
 - Staff training takes place in May/June, prior to camper arrival.
 - ◆ All camps are required to provide a one- to two-week on-site training.
 - ◆ Mandated certification courses in lifeguard training, first aid, and other program areas often take place during this time

KEY QUESTIONS FROM LOCAL OFFICIALS ON THE IMPACT OF CAMP OPENING

The [American Camp Association](#) (ACA) and the [YMCAs of the United States](#) (Y-USA) are engaged together to provide educational resources to both day and overnight camps, state and local health departments, and parents/guardians and campers. The educational resources have been developed by an independent expert panel coordinated by [Environmental Health & Engineering, Inc.](#) (EH&E), a Boston-based consulting firm specializing in environmental health. The [Field Guide for Camps](#) is available to camps to help them understand key components of guidelines and directives and to determine how they might adapt/implement those guidelines in their camp setting. This field guide was updated throughout the summer, with a major update and the addition of two new chapters in October of this year. EH&E will continue to monitor the evolving data, recommended and medical practices, and the availability of emerging resources through the coming year, updating the Field Guide as necessary.

The table of contents of the guide shows many of the areas camps can expect to address in conversation with their local health officials.

- Communication
- Content and Guideline Communication
- Health Screening and Preventing COVID-19 Infections
- Facilities
- Food Service and Deliveries
- Cleaning and Disinfection
- Activities
- Campers and Staff
- Transportation
- PPE for Workers and Staff
- Supplies
- Technology and Controls
- Medical Testing for Diagnosis and Screening
- Related Checklists

Camps are encouraged to highlight the Field Guide for Camps in conversations with their regulatory bodies. The guide has been revised and updated with information gained from the safe operation of camps in 2020 and advances in medical knowledge about the disease. Ask if the health officer has seen this resource and offer to send a link before any meetings. Many local jurisdictions have been actively engaged with discussions about this resource through their public health organizations.

A [CDC study](#) highlighted how four overnight camps in Maine prevented COVID-19 outbreaks among more than 1,000 campers and staff. Use information from this study to help you present your case for a successful operation. In addition, ACA has conducted a national research project this fall to capture the key findings from the field of camp in the summer of 2020. Results from that study will be available in December 2020.

In addition to the topics listed on the previous page, health officials will want to discuss additional specifics about your camp following the points on your local public health orders and guidelines. These could include:

- Overall physical distancing plan, including decreasing densities
- Ages of campers
- Cohorting plan
- Enhanced sanitation plan
- Pre-camp health screening
- Testing
- Communicable disease plan and response to outbreak
 - identification
 - isolation (separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick)
 - quarantine (separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick)
- Projected impact on local community health care and facilities
- How much of your program operates primarily outdoors vs. indoors?
- Home of origin of your projected campers/staff
- Contact tracing capability
- Training plan for your staff and campers in new procedures
- How quickly you can pivot in instances of a resurgence of the disease around you and potential reinstatement of stricter shelter-at-home orders
- It may also be important to discuss the possibility of access to a vaccine for adult camp staff under the childcare worker category

It may be helpful to review guidelines from other states to help you support your case. It is important to remember that not all points in the guidelines may apply to your situation and that states may be revising even successful guidelines based on new knowledge. Check back often.

What Is the Overall Impact of Camp?

Opening camp is about partnering with local agencies to support the community and serving as part of the solution through open dialogue, childcare for working parents, safe space (and depending on the camp food, etc.) for children. Camp is part of the mental health solution for youth, provides out-of-school-time learning opportunities, and, most importantly, provides social emotional learning development (currently missing in many school settings). Camp is also an economic partner to the community.

Impact of overall camp industry

- Camp is more than a \$20 billion industry
- 15,000 camps in US — more than 9,200 are overnight and more than 6,100 are day camps
- Each year more than 26 million children, youth, and adults attend camp in the US
- Each year camps provide more than 1.2 million jobs
- Camps contribute more than \$26 billion to local economies and businesses

2020 camp overview COVID-19 impact

- More than 19.5 million individuals, mostly youth, were not served
- More than \$16 billion lost in direct revenue
- Approximately 900,000 camp jobs lost
- More than \$20 billion in indirect economic benefit to businesses and communities lost