



FAQ's

As we looked at the impact of COVID-19 on our summer at camp, we looked at a very long list of potential impacts and considered many possible scenarios. In order for you to better understand just some of the thinking that went into this decision, we have outlined a few areas below. These are just a few data points that simply represent the “tip of the iceberg” in our process, but hopefully give you some sense of the things we needed to consider for our camp community.

Is COVID-19 containable without social distancing?

Perhaps the most concerning factor is that every medical expert that we have spoken with, from ER Doctors to Pediatricians to Infectious Disease Specialists, has assured us that we will have COVID-19 in camp once we bring 800 people together. Additionally, no entity or industry thus far has managed to contain this particular infectious disease in a high social density environment with any effectiveness (i.e. - cruise ships, meatpacking plants, employee dormitories, nursing homes, etc...). Yes, we do many activities outdoors, but we also live in cabins, eat in the dining hall, do activities inside throughout the day and even more so whenever we have inclement weather. Containing this virus in a high social density environment such as camp, something no one else has done safely to date, feels like an extraordinary leap for us to take with the health and safety of our campers and staff.

Can testing keep COVID -19 out of camp?

Even with mass testing, we cannot assure we will not have COVID-19 in camp. We have looked at many testing options that could be available to us. None of the current options provide us with a level of confidence that they would ensure that we can operate camp free of COVID-19, nor create a hoped-for “bubble” of immunity.

How would the COVID-19 mitigation guidelines for summer camps impact daily life at camp?

Intuitively, “social distancing” and summer camp are at complete odds with each other. Among the many best practice guidelines in the study just produced for the American Camp Association (ACA) were protocols for social distancing while at camp. Campers and staff are directed to commonly move in a base group of one or two cabins (the smaller group the better), moving to slightly larger groups when needed, with limited, if any, socializing outside of those groups. Echo Lake is a community of nearly 800 campers and staff. For your children, that means siblings in different age groups not being able to hang-out with one another up close. That means campers with friends outside of their individual groups not being able to spend time with them. That means important camp community events like afternoon snack in the grove, Friday Night Services, Evening Line-up, Tribal Sing, to name just a few, could not take place. We cannot imagine having to police your children and our staff all summer who just want to get close to one another for a hug, a high-five, to tell a joke, or share one of the day’s small victories or special experiences. More painful to imagine is a homesick child not being able to be within six feet of a Head Counselor or Director to receive an arm around the shoulder or a hug; or that child only able to hear words of love, care and wisdom from a medically-appropriate distance or from someone wearing PPE.

How would the presence of COVID-19 impact our Health Center?

Medical guidelines suggest camper or staff presenting COVID-19-like symptoms should be handled by the Health Center as a presumptive positive case of COVID-19. Since there are a number of symptoms that overlap with symptoms of the common cold (i.e. fever, cough, stomach ache, shortness of breath etc) and other types of minor illnesses, it is inevitable that unnecessarily quarantining campers and staff due to COVID-like symptoms, while COVID-19 tests are conducted and results are awaited, will have to become part of our daily protocols.

In a typical summer, we have to be on our toes to manage and mitigate contagions like impetigo, pink eye and other easily identifiable viruses. The idea of adding into our camp setting a novel, highly infectious, invisible virus that can be rapidly spread before any symptoms can be spotted feels daunting and risky to us.

There is a lot we still don't know about COVID-19. While we have all been comforted that kids have largely been spared more serious illness, there are now concerning signs coming from the medical community, and a health alert from the CDC, that a small number of children are experiencing some more significant post-infection symptoms known as multi-system inflammatory disease. This is not only unnerving, but for us it underscores the larger issue that there remain many unknowns around COVID-19.

How will this impact the Echo Lake staff who are the backbone of camp?

Camp Echo Lake cannot properly care for our campers without the good health of our 290 adult staff who work across all areas of camp. All of our staff are in age cohorts with greater COVID-19 risk than our campers. Many key staff at Echo Lake are over the age of 40.

During the summer, the demands on our staff are significant. There is sure to be additional stress on our staff this summer given the past few months that we have all lived through and the inevitable presence of COVID-19 in camp. Each summer, staff receive training regarding typical medical issues that campers may face. This summer would need to include the myriad of COVID-19 symptoms. The responsibility to be on the lookout for children with COVID-19 symptoms can be most worrisome for you as parents. Now we will be asking staff to become trained in recognizing COVID-19 symptoms in their campers and themselves. Additionally, many staff, just like your children, will be coming to camp with their own psychological worries and anxiety about COVID-19. In addition to managing that for themselves, we will be asking them to manage it for their campers too. We know that we as adults have been struggling to manage all of these physical and psychological health concerns and, in our estimation, the additional burden on staff will be keenly felt by them.

Additionally, staff having limited ability to socialize outside of their core cabin group or two and being asked to remain on camp for the entire duration of their weeks working at camp will only add to their stress. Based on what we have learned working with staff over many decades, social connection with peers and the ability to take time away from camp are essential for staff in order to maintain their morale as well as their positive mental and physical health. If staff members are not properly able to care for themselves, they cannot be at their best to care for your children.

We have many camp-critical staff who live year-round in Warrensburg - and thus come and go daily. These include our chefs who prepare all of our camp meals, including our meals for campers and staff with allergies and special dietary needs. Several of our nurses and our entire maintenance and housekeeping teams live locally. Camp simply cannot operate without them. Even if we check their temperature and test them daily (factoring in the imperfections of current testing), their comings and goings both increase the likelihood and speed of spread both in camp and in our local community.

What does this mean for the 2020 LITs and 4n4 Groups?

The LIT and 4n4 summers are once-in-a-lifetime experiences that we want our campers to have. In 2021, we will invite our 2020 LITs to return to be our 2021 LITs; and will invite our 2020 4n4s to go on 4n4 in 2021. Every other group in camp will move up accordingly, which means our campers who would have been Upper Villagers this summer will also have their own 4n4 experience in 2021.

What happens to the payments I have already made for this summer?

You will receive a second e-mail this afternoon with a separate link so you can let us know what you wish to do with the payments you have already made for camp this summer. You will be asked to let us know if you would like us to roll over any or all of your payments for 2021 (for which there will be provided a financial incentive) or return to you what has been paid to date.