



Communicable Diseases and Outbreaks: Summer Camps

Information for Camp Directors and Health Personnel

What is an outbreak?

An outbreak is any disease in a community in greater numbers than normal. Sometimes, a single case of disease may be an outbreak. **Because no communicable diseases are known to be regularly found among summer campers, two or more cases are sufficient to alert the local health department (LHD).** Common diseases found in camps are [Lyme disease](#), [norovirus](#), and [whooping cough](#).

How are diseases spread?

The following are some of the most common ways diseases are spread:



Person-to-person contact

For example:
coughing/sneezing,
not properly washing
hands, sharing
utensils



Water sources

For example:
unapproved sources,
contaminated
water supply



Food sources

For example: sick
employees, dirty
equipment,
undercooked foods



Animal or vector

For example: bats,
raccoons, mosquitoes,
ticks



How can communicable diseases be controlled ?

In order to control a communicable disease, you have to interrupt the cycle. Proper handwashing is essential no matter how the disease is being spread.

Person-to-Person:

- Separate the sick from the well.
- Provide antibiotics or other medications to the sick individuals as appropriate.
- Give appropriate preventative treatment to anyone who was exposed to the sick person.

Food/Water/Animal/Vector:

- Identify the source.
- Protect people from being exposed to that source (for example: throw away contaminated foods, use bottled water for drinking, use tick and mosquito repellent.)

What steps should a Camp Director take if a communicable disease is suspected in one or more campers or staff?

- It is state law to [report communicable diseases to LHDs](#).
- If a communicable disease is reported in one or more campers or staff, the camp should notify their consulting doctor **AND** [their LHD](#).
- The LHD will then tell the Camp Director how they should control the disease and whether specimens need to be collected for laboratory testing.

How can Camp Directors help LHDs when there is an outbreak?

Depending on the situation, camp directors should be prepared to give the LHD any information they need to make sure proper testing and follow-up are completed. This information may include:

- Symptoms of sick people
- Immunization records
- Information about camp activities
- Information on food and water exposures
- Interactions they had with others outside of the camp



What do Camp Directors need to know about vaccines?

- Vaccines are safe and effective. They provide protection against diseases such as measles, mumps, meningitis, chicken pox, and whooping cough.
- Nearly all campers need to be vaccinated to prevent disease from spreading.
- You can encourage or require each camper to be up to date with their vaccines before programming starts. **Note:** Licensed summer camps must follow [Wisconsin's child care reporting requirements](#) for immunizations.

What steps can Camp Directors take to prevent an outbreak from occurring?

- Encourage or require that campers are up to date with their vaccines and provide that information before getting to camp
- Have soap and water and encourage [good hand hygiene](#)
- Do not let campers share personal items (for example: water bottles, towels, razors, or toothbrushes)
- Notify parents when campers are sick
- Set up “sick” and “well” cabins to prevent an outbreak from spreading
- Consider sending sick campers home
- Monitor well campers for symptoms

What resources are available?

- [Communicable Disease Chart](#)—DHS
- [Keep Kids Safe This Summer](#)—CDC
- [Camping Health and Safety Tips](#)—CDC
- [Recreational Water Illnesses](#)—CDC
- [Wash Your Hands!](#)—DHS
- [Immunization resources](#)—DHS



Questions? Contact Us!

- Bureau of Communicable Diseases Main Line: 608-267-9003
- Email: dhsdphbcd@dhs.wi.gov

