

risk reporter

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Camps learn to deal with H1N1 virus

The H1N1 virus has really hit home for people across the nation. But it hasn't been limited to that setting.

Pristine places like Camp Luther in Three Lakes, Wis., have been affected by the "swine flu" outbreak.

"We had two campers who tested positive in mid-June," Director of Outdoor Ministry Gary "Woody" Vought said. "They arrived on a Sunday and weren't feeling well by Wednesday or Thursday. Their symptoms were not serious. When the girls got back home, we got a call from their parents saying they had tested positive for H1N1."

Two staff members also tested positive.

It's a scene that's become all too common — approximately 60 camps in 20 states have had to close their facilities due to the outbreak.

Fortunately, Camp Luther wasn't among them.

"We haven't had anything since," Vought reported.

Communication helped avoid a panic

"We had super parents who were very cooperative and understanding," Vought said. "Initially, when we learned of the issue, we made phone calls to every single family that currently had campers on our site and then contacted all of the campers from the previous week by mail."

That timely response on the part of camp staff touched a chord with the parents.

"We were concerned about the existing campers because parents don't want to know Friday when they come to pick them up," Vought reasoned. "They want to know now. They were told to call my number if they had any questions. I got one e-mail and one phone call. Evidently, we did a good job of explaining or people are getting used to the idea and aren't paranoid."

Camp Luther, which has 300 people on the grounds in a given week, has taken prudent precautions for the remainder of its season:

- Lengthy meetings with the staff regarding the camp's response to the situation so that they were properly informed and could communicate in an informative way with both parents and guests.
- Stepped-up screening of campers.

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(H1N1)

- Letters sent prior to the week campers are attending asking if anyone has experienced any flu-like symptoms in the past seven days. "We want to talk to them before they drive up and register," Vought said.
- Mass sterilization of the camp, with an all-hands-on-deck effort to clean everything possible.
- Stressing regular hand washing by both staff and campers.
- Additional hand sanitizing stations in the dining hall, canteen and at other spots around the camp. "Primarily, places that get a lot of fingerprints and touches to them," Vought said.

Other suggestions from the American Camp Association:

- Individual tongs for people to use at salad bars.
- Alcohol wipes at high-contact areas like ropes courses, horseback riding and crafts.
- Family-style serving where one staff member serves and pours for the entire table.
- Encouragement of camp staff to get plenty of rest.

All of the above-mentioned precautions follow suggestions

from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It has additional thoughts for camp administrators on its Web site:

- Develop a working relationship with local health officials.
- Review applicable state laws.
- Develop transportation logistics for ill persons that limit exposure to others.

Looking ahead to the winter (for camps open year-round) and 2010, Executive Director Linda Ebner Erceg of the Association of Camp Nurses had this to say:

"The most impactful thing a camp can do is to review its response pattern from this summer and adapt/amend it in ways that will make next summer better for everyone," she said. "Communicable diseases will not disappear. Let's make sure everyone's in the best position possible to work through the situation."

That doesn't need to start with more vigorous than normal end-of-season cleaning for all camps.

"I would not get too excited about that if a camp is going to close up for the winter," Ebner Erceg said. "Any H1N1/2009 virus will be long gone by summer."

Facts and tips about H1N1

H1N1 is a new flu strain that appears to be highly contagious. It's hitting outside the typical flu season, healthy young people are suffering disproportionately and it's spreading rapidly around the world. At present, there is no existing vaccine—though one is anticipated sometime this fall.

- Symptoms are similar to the seasonal flu but includes a fever plus at least either a cough or sore throat. H1N1 also can cause headache, fatigue, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, chills, diarrhea and vomiting.
- Only a lab test can confirm if you truly have H1N1.
- H1N1 is spread primarily through coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the virus. People can also become infected by touching someone with the virus and then touching their own mouth or nose.
- Remind staff and campers to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze. With all of the outdoor activities at camps, encourage people to cough/sneeze into their shoulder.
- Discourage people from touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
- According to the CDC, those who are ill should stay

home/be isolated until they have been symptom-free for 24 hours.

- Employees and campers with symptoms should immediately be removed from the general population until they can safely be returned home or taken for medical care.
- Monitor H1N1 through a credible source. The CDC is the resource of choice for most.
- People already suffering from medical problems typically have more problems because of the flu, and it can affect their underlying condition too. According to the CDC, the majority of H1N1-related hospitalizations have occurred in people with an underlying condition, such as a respiratory illness (like asthma), heart disease, diabetes and immune deficiencies.
- Don't wait until the flu hits: create a plan and review it annually to find opportunities for improvement. Your plan should include steps to prevent and limit the spread of flu.

Resource

- **For more information** from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, go to www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm.



Managing Your Risks

Keep wagon rides safe

Many adults have fond memories of participating in a wagon or sleigh ride as a child. No matter the season, the destination often includes a campfire, refreshments, music, stories and lots of fun.

Unfortunately, some of these trips turn tragic when simple safety procedures fail to be followed.

Each year, Church Mutual customers report accidents involving wagons or sleighs being pulled by horses or tractors. Teenagers and young adults sustain most injuries. Some of them include:

- A young girl fell off the side of a sleigh and was run over by the skis, breaking both of her legs. The sleigh had no side rails.
- A man was killed when he fell off the wagon he was riding on. He stood up to brush off his pants and lost his balance.
- A young boy was allowed to jump off a wagon while it was moving. When he attempted to climb back on, he fell under the wagon and was crushed by one of the tires.
- A young girl's legs were crushed when the driver of the wagon took a corner too sharply and hit a building with the wagon. The girl was riding with her legs hanging off the side of the wagon.

Proper supervision is the key element to a safe wagon or sleigh activity. Making sure those supervisors know what rules to enforce also is essential.

Other requirements include:

- Rails along the sides and back of the wagon
- A no-standing rule
- Keeping arms and legs inside the wagon
- Maintaining a slow speed
- Selecting a route that is not too bumpy and doesn't have large hills

For more tips on ensuring a safe wagon and sleigh ride, go to www.churchmutual.com, select Safety Resources, click on Risk Alerts and open Wagon Safety.

Richard J. Schaber, CPCU, CRM
Risk Control Manager



seasonal spotlight

Beat the heat with common sense

Camps and fun in the sun go hand in hand.

But when you have high temperatures, coupled with high humidity, it's time to move on to less strenuous activities or take the group indoors to avoid heat-related illnesses.

One person who sees all too many of these firsthand is Dr. Joan Shook, chief of emergency medicine at the prestigious Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

"I saw a kid when I was working in the emergency department this weekend," she said. "Heaven only knows why he was playing a tennis camp tournament in the full sun in the afternoon. In the middle of the third set, he fell to the ground from heat exhaustion."

That's what extreme heat can do to a teenager.

"Not only was he dehydrated, but he didn't have any sunscreen on," Dr. Shook added. "He was red as a beet with a severe sunburn. Where was the person with the lick of sense saying it's 105 degrees and they're playing on a concrete court?"

Dr. Shook's common sense advice for concentrated, competitive activities?

- Have them early in the day or late in the day when it's a little bit cooler.
- Require children take frequent water breaks.
- Allow them to have electrolyte-balanced solutions, such as Gatorade or an equivalent thereof. "There are a zillion of them out there," she pointed out. "If you're actively engaged in an athletic pursuit, it's OK to drink those sugar solutions."

An important fact for all camps is young children are more susceptible to heat-related illnesses than adults.

"That's because they have a greater body surface area in proportion to their size," Dr. Shook explained. "That means that they're sweating more — they have more surface area to sweat and interact with the environment."

There are other reasons more mental than physical.

"Children are sometimes more taken away with an activity than an adult might be," Dr. Shook said. "If it is just fun to swim or be playing kickball, a child may not be able to moderate his behavior. They are inclined to have authority figures around them telling them what to do."

So, in an idyllic camps setting, is swimming the safest sport?

"Maybe in terms of heat-related illnesses," Dr. Shook responded. "We don't typically see kids who've been swimming because the water helps cool you off."

"The problem we do see is the sun-related illnesses," she continued. "I think there's sort of a common misconception that more darkly complected children can't get sun injury. Also, the reflective nature of water increases the amount of sun that you're exposed to, so people need to be cognizant of that."

q | a

A Perspective

Challenge courses are designed to safely take participants out of their comfort zone for a new and exciting experience. The courses provide new and exciting challenges for the camp directors as well.

Challenge courses need to be set up and inspected by certified professionals to ensure the safety of the participants.



Risk reporter spoke with Randy Smith, who is the president of INNERQUEST Inc. in Purcellville, Va.

Smith has been building, inspecting and training on challenge courses for more than 30 years.

Risk Reporter: How often should you have your challenge course inspected?

Smith: All challenge courses should be inspected by an external professional at least yearly. The professional inspector should be able to provide a certificate of insurance with endorsements for professional liability and completed operations liability. The Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) offers an accreditation program for challenge course vendors, which helps assure a high degree of experience, knowledge and professionalism.

Risk Reporter: What other types of inspections are the most critical?

Smith: Three types should be done on all challenge course elements and gear. No. 1, trained staff should inspect all elements and gear prior to use each day. Some states require that they be documented in writing. No. 2, the on-site course manager, who needs to have additional training, should do a more thorough, tactile inspection every three months.

Risk Reporter: What is the recommended age for challenge course participants?

Smith: That depends on the course and the staff training. In general, I recommend 10 years old as the minimum. This is the point in cognitive and affective development where participants begin to appreciate their responsibilities in doing the activities and also start to benefit from the learning objectives being presented.

Risk Reporter: How much attention do you need to pay to gear?

Smith: When it comes to storage, remember that all of this gear is rated for "life support" and should be treated with appropriate care. Store in a cool, dry, dark place with good air circulation and humidity control. Storage areas must also be rodent-proof and insect-proof. Clean and dry all gear as needed before storing and keep written records of the age of all soft gear (lanyards, ropes, harnesses, helmets, etc.).

Risk Reporter: What are some good rules of thumb regarding zip lines?

Smith: Age and usage should be provided yearly to the professional inspector. Generally, zip line cables need to be replaced at a maximum of 10 years or 10,000 rides or if any significant damage or wear is discovered. In addition, I highly recommend double-checking all zip lines and giant swings for proper ground clearance prior to launching any taller- or heavier-than-usual participants.

Risk Reporter: How about low and high ropes courses?

Smith: ACCT standards make no distinction between the two in terms of inspections. Considering the fact that more falls, injuries and lawsuits happen on low elements, it is important to treat them the same way as the rest of the course. Rocks, stumps and roots should be removed and the area covered with mulch or woodchips to provide a safe participant area. Don't forget to remove all large overhead limbs or standing dead trees in the course area.