

Information About Recreational Camps for Children in Massachusetts: Questions and Answers for Parents and Guardians



are not subject to MDPH’s regulatory provisions and therefore do not have to follow the requirements that apply to licensed recreational camps and are not subject to inspections by either MDPH or a local board of health.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE REGULATIONS?

The regulations establish minimum health, safety, sanitary, and housing standards to protect the well-being of children who are in the care of recreational camps for children in Massachusetts. These regulations include:

- requiring camps to perform criminal record background checks on each staff person and volunteer prior to employment and every 3 years for permanent employees;
- requiring proof of camper and staff immunizations;
- requiring proof of appropriate training, certification, or experience for staff conducting or supervising specialized or high risk activities (including swimming and watercraft activities).

WHAT IS A LICENSED RECREATIONAL CAMP FOR CHILDREN?

A licensed recreational camp for children may be a day or residential (overnight) program that offers recreational activities and instruction to campers. There are certain factors, such as the number of children the camp serves, the length of time the camp is in session, and the type of entity operating a program, that determine whether a program is considered a recreational camp under Massachusetts law and regulations and therefore must be licensed (see M.G.L. c. 111, §127A and 105 CMR 430.000: Minimum Standards for Recreational Camps for Children).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A RECREATIONAL CAMP TO BE LICENSED?

If a camp meets the definition of a recreational camp it must be inspected and licensed by the local board of health in the city or town where the camp is located. It must also meet all regulatory standards established by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and any additional local requirements.

ARE ALL SUMMER PROGRAMS REQUIRED TO BE LICENSED AS RECREATIONAL CAMPS FOR CHILDREN?

No. Programs that do not meet the legal definition of a recreational camp for children

WHAT DOES THE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT EVALUATE AS PART OF A CAMP INSPECTION?

The primary purpose of the inspection is to ensure that the camp provides an appropriate environment to protect the health, safety, and well-being of the campers. Examples of things inspectors look for include: safe structures and equipment; adequate sanitary facilities; sufficient supervision of the campers; appropriate plans in case of medical emergencies, natural, and other physical disasters; sufficient health care coverage; and injury and fire prevention plans. Contact the local health department or local board of health in the community in which the camp is located

to find out mandatory requirements, policies, and standards.

WHERE CAN I GET INFORMATION ON THE STATUS OF A RECREATIONAL CAMP'S LICENSE?

Contact the local health department or board of health in the community where the camp is located to determine if the camp is a licensed recreational camp for children, confirm the status of the camp's license, and obtain a copy of the camp's most recent inspection report.

ARE RECREATIONAL CAMPS REQUIRED TO PROVIDE COPIES OF OPERATING PLANS AND PROCEDURES?

Yes. The camp must provide copies of any of the required plans and procedures on request.

ARE THERE MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS FOR CAMP COUNSELORS IN MASSACHUSETTS?

Yes. All counselors in licensed recreational camps are required to have at least four weeks experience in a supervisory role with children or four weeks experience with structured group camping. Counselors must also complete an orientation program before campers arrive at camp. Any counselor who supervises children in activities such as horseback riding, hiking, swimming, and other events must also have appropriate specialized training, certification, and experience in the activity. You may ask to see proof that a counselor is certified in a particular activity.

HOW OLD DO CAMP COUNSELORS HAVE TO BE?

There are different age requirements depending on the type of camp. A counselor working at a licensed residential (overnight), sports, travel, trip, or medical specialty camp must be 18 years of age or have graduated from high school. Counselors working at a day camp must be at least 16 years of age. All counselors at licensed camps in Massachusetts are required to be at least three years older than the campers they supervise.

IS THE CAMP REQUIRED TO CONDUCT BACKGROUND CHECKS ON CAMP STAFF?

Yes. For all camp staff and volunteers, the licensed recreational camp for children must conduct a background check that includes obtaining and reviewing the applicant's previous work history and confirming three positive references. The camp must also obtain a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) history/juvenile report history from the Massachusetts Department of Criminal Justice Information Services to determine whether the applicant has a juvenile record or has committed a crime that would indicate the applicant is not suitable for a position with campers. The camp must conduct CORI re-checks every three years for permanent employees with no break in service.

The local health department will verify that CORI checks have been conducted during their annual licensing inspection. If an applicant resides in another state or in a foreign jurisdiction, where practicable, the camp must also obtain from the applicant's criminal information system board, the chief of police, or other relevant authority a criminal record check or its recognized equivalent. The camp is required to hire staff and volunteers whose backgrounds are free of conduct that bears adversely upon his or her ability to provide for the safety and well-being of the campers.

IS THE CAMP REQUIRED TO CHECK STAFF AND VOLUNTEER BACKGROUNDS FOR A HISTORY OF SEXUAL OFFENSES?

Yes. The operator of the camp must obtain a Sex Offender Registry Information (SORI) report from the Massachusetts Sex Offender Registry Board (SORB) for all prospective camp staff, including any volunteers, and every three years for permanent employees with no break in service. The Sex Offender Registry Board is a public safety agency responsible for protecting the public from sex offenders. The local health department will verify that SORI checks have been conducted during their annual licensing inspection. For more information concerning the Sex Offender Registry Board, and SORI information and policies available to the public, visit the SORB website at www.mass.gov/sorb.

HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT SUCH BACKGROUND CHECKS HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED?

You can request a copy of the camp's written policy on staff background checks from the camp director and ask the Board of Health to confirm that background checks were completed at the camp. Please note, however, that you are not authorized to review any staff person's actual CORI or SORI report.

IS THE CAMP REQUIRED TO HAVE A PERSON ON-SITE WHO KNOWS FIRST AID AND CPR?

Yes. All licensed camps are required to have a health care supervisor at the camp at all times who is at least 18 years of age and is currently certified in first aid and CPR. The camp must provide backup for the health care supervisor from a Massachusetts licensed physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner who serves as a health care consultant. Medical specialty camps and residential camps where there are a large number of campers and staff must have a licensed health care provider, such as a physician or nurse, on site.

HOW CAN I COORDINATE MY CHILD'S MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION WHILE AT A RECREATIONAL CAMP?

Parents or guardians must give approval for their child to receive any medication at a recreational camp. Licensed camps are required to keep all medications in their original containers and to store all prescription medications in a secure manner. If your child will be participating in off-site activities while taking prescription medication, a second original pharmacy container must be provided to the camp. The only individual authorized to give your child his/her medication is a licensed health care professional or the camp health care supervisor with oversight by the camp health care consultant. (Note that other arrangements may be made for emergency medications such as epinephrine auto-injectors and inhalers.) When your child's participation at a camp ends, the medication must be returned to you, if possible, or destroyed.

CAN A CAMP DISCIPLINE MY CHILD?

Yes. Camps are required to have a written disciplinary policy that explains their methods of appropriate discipline, for example, a 'time-out' from activities or sending a child to the camp director's office. Under no circumstances, however, may a camper be subjected to corporal punishment such as spanking, be punished by withholding food or water, or subject to verbal abuse or humiliation.

WHAT STEPS DOES A CAMP HAVE TO TAKE TO PROTECT MY CHILD FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

All licensed recreational camps must have policies and procedures in place to protect campers from abuse and neglect while at camp. You may ask a camp representative for specific information on the camp's policies and procedures for reporting a suspected incident. In order to protect your child from possible abuse, you should talk openly and frequently with your child about how to stay safe around adults and other children.

WHAT STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO HELP PROTECT CHILDREN FROM MOSQUITO AND TICKBORNE DISEASE SUCH AS EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS (EEE), WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV), AND LYME DISEASE?

Parents/guardians and camp administrators should discuss the need for repellent with campers and what repellent(s) may be available at the camp. Use of insect repellents that contain 30% or lower of DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide) are widely available and are generally considered to be safe and effective for children (older than 2 months of age) when used as directed and certain precautions are observed. These products should be applied based on the amount of time the camper spends outdoors and the length of time protection is expected as specified on the product label.

Use of DEET products that combine repellent with sunscreen are not recommended, as over application of DEET can occur if sunscreens need to be applied more frequently. It is generally recommended to apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent.

Repellents containing DEET should only be applied to exposed skin, and children should be encouraged to cover skin with clothing when possible, particularly for early morning and evening activities when more mosquitoes are present. DEET products should not be applied near the eyes and mouth; applied over open cuts, wounds, or irritated skin; or applied on the hands of young children (the CDC recommends that adults apply repellents to young children). Skin where the repellent was applied should be washed with soap and water after returning indoors and treated clothing should be washed before it is worn again. Spraying of repellents directly to the face, near other campers, or in enclosed areas should be avoided.

For More Information on Recreational Camps Please Follow the web link below:

The Department has designed an additional document “Important Webpage Links regarding Recreational Camps for Children” to assist stakeholders with access to relevant information associated with Recreational Camps for Children. This document contains webpage links for related material and other points of interest.

[Important Webpage Links.docx](#)

Do not rely on glossy pictures and slick brochures when choosing a recreational camp for your child.

Contact the camp director to schedule an appointment for an informational meeting and tour of the facility prior to registering your child.

Ask the camp for a copy of its policies regarding staff background checks, as well as health care and disciplinary procedures. Ask to see a copy of the procedures for filing complaints with the camp.

Call the local health department/board in the city or town where the camp is located for information regarding inspections of the camp and to inquire about the camp’s license status.

Obtain names of other families who have sent their children to the camp, and contact them for an independent reference.

For More Information

If you would like a copy of the state regulations or additional information concerning recreational camps for children, please visit www.mass.gov/dph/dcs or call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau for Environmental Health's Community Sanitation Program at 617-624-5757 | Fax: 617-624-5777 | TTY: 617-624-5286



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