

Frequently Asked Questions

These are the most common questions that we have received and our most up-to-date answers.

Why couldn't you try to social distance at camp?

For one, the social distancing measures in a camp setting that would be required are not realistic nor is it conducive to giving your children the summer that they deserve and need. Not only is it impossible to execute, but it would tarnish your children's camp experience. We would not feel comfortable enforcing a rule that requires that all campers and staff are forbidden from holding hands or giving a hug. To say kids would always have to stay five or six feet away from each other in a cabin or anywhere is just not realistic in our opinion.

From no bussing, to screening upon entry, daily screening by counsellors, inability to console a child, inability to hold natural unit gatherings, theatre and fireside gatherings, no meals with campers on benches touching each other, separating beds and reducing cabin group sizes, removing indoor activities in small spaces, even doing a simple buddy call at swim would pose a challenge, and the worst yet, no line ups to get tuck!

Would the campers and staff not be safe living in a "bubble"?

That's fine in theory, but the reality is that you just need one case of COVID-19 to infect many people. There is no public testing available that could be given to each camper and staff and even if there was, the reliability of current testing technology is far from foolproof especially in asymptomatic carriers with lots of potential for false negatives. With current testing limitations it would be impossible to know if any child with a fever or a sore throat, for example, or other minor ailment may in fact be COVID-19 positive with the potential for him/her to infect others. Secondly, camps have people entering and exiting camp daily to service equipment, drop off food and supplies, fix hydro, check fire extinguishers etc. Staff could never leave camp and even spouses and partners of our director team would not be allowed in. Runs to the hospital for medical emergencies, supplies and medicine would create further exposure of nurses and campers and staff. The Parry Sound Medical Centre may not even be able to admit our campers if COVID-19 hits them during the summer.

Why couldn't you just disinfect everything?

In addition to disinfection in cabins and common use areas, we would have to disinfect all baggage coming into camp, packs and all supplies including food and medicines that are picked up from town. Currently all public health directives in the USA, Australia and the ones being discussed in Ontario indicate the requirement that every item in camp such as an archery bow, guitar, pottery tool or canoe is disinfected after each use. As well, kids would also be required to properly wash their hands before and after they touch anything!

The protocols around having all 100 washrooms disinfected twice daily, could be done by professionals, but ensuring campers do not share any towels or clothing or act in a perfectly hygienic way in a cabin group is challenging to say the least.

Why can't you just reopen with a few weeks notice?

There is just so much that goes on behind the scenes to ensure every single child at Manitou has "the best summer ever" whether it be medical, social or emotional issues or dealing with cabin

dynamic concerns, self-esteem issues, and understanding the personality and character of every child so they feel supported. We take great pride in following through on every piece of wisdom and advice you as parents pass on to us.

Our director team reviews every medical form, camper application, activity form, email, and parent information form to ensure your child has the best chance for success. We then meet our summer director team, our health care team, our unit heads and activity heads in advance of pre-camp so that they can properly follow through on every aspect of your child(ren)'s care.

We have been shut down by government order since March and as a result, we have been unable to prepare our physical camp property for the summer. At Manitou, because we have over 100 buildings each with their own washroom, it takes months to safely open while also ensuring that the water flow in the pipes is running smoothly with proper disinfection in place. Additionally, we have to prepare the site, check for trees that need to be cut down if they are safety hazards, fix up roads, and do all of our safety reviews and follow-up maintenance of each building along with fire equipment systems, etc.

Why couldn't you just run in August?

Remember you just need one case of COVID-19 to enter camp to cause the entire camp to be at risk. We are told by the experts that in December or January we should have the necessary data to truly prepare for a safe summer for 2021, but we just are not there yet. The only thing harder than a bad outcome is the uncertainty that precedes it. We feel if you have time to digest the news with your children and have more time to prepare for your summer that you are far better off. If anything changes, we of course will let you know, but at this time it is unlikely. We do intend to re-evaluate new sessions if we feel the risks are reduced substantially while being able to comply with public health guidelines.

What's the big deal? Kids don't get sick.

It is possible that most kids will not get sick, however there are still many unknowns about the effect on children. To date, there have not been any peer-reviewed approved studies confirming if children are transmitters or the long-term effect on children, but we hope the news stays positive in this regard. At the same time, we have to be cognizant of the fact that children can contract this disease and we require far more information regarding which children are most susceptible and why. For example, in the last few weeks we have learned about a rare potentially serious presentation in children that appears to be related to COVID-19. It resembles a typical but more severe version of something called "Kawasaki" disease, which is a known condition in younger children. Just recently there have also been concerns about other inflammatory diseases affecting children include heart disease. We do not know enough yet to know the relationship if any to COVID-19.

For our staff the risks are clear and people who do contract this virus can get ill not just for a few days, but for weeks and months on end! The experts do agree that this illness can be severe and not like anything we have ever experienced in our lifetime in its severest form. We also do not know what the long-term negative implications are for those who have suffered from the illness.

Unfortunately, the press is in the business of portraying daily solutions, but any expert will tell you it takes almost a year of analysis combining all the research papers in order to understand the full scope of the virus. It will be the immunologists, epidemiologists, physicians, and even historians

of science that will meet and analyze how we move forward. It is estimated that six months' time is when we will be in a position to have a true understanding of this virus and its potential impact.

Why can't we sign a waiver and just send our kids to camp?

For us this is not about legal liability, but rather ensuring the well-being of those we love; your children, our staff, and our collective families. We have not even factored into our decision the potential spike in cases as campers and staff re-enter their community, infecting parents and grandparents. Also, we are just not at a stage where testing is available.

You have lots of staff so what's the big deal if 10 or 20 of them get sick?

Likely the first to be affected will be our head staff. We cannot run a safe camp knowing many of our key staff could be absent. We would be losing some of our older international staff and the average age of our staff will decline significantly, placing far more responsibility on our younger staff at a time when it is crucial to have the most mature staff possible.

One of the reasons our campers have such a positive experience at Manitou is because staff morale is high and there are older staff to properly supervise and serve as a role model for the younger staff. You can imagine if many staff are sick, along with the pressures of ensuring their campers are socially isolating, doing daily health checklists or being worried about getting ill, how this will affect their performance and ability to provide the level of care needed for our campers. Also restricting our staff from being able to go on a weekly day off outside of camp may sound like a minor thing, but they do need proper time to reboot each week.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act requires us to review with each staff member the COVID-19 related risks of this job and our staff have the right to decide to leave camp once the summer starts if they are feeling apprehensive.

If camp runs would the owners ("the oldies") even be there?

Our Director, Maintenance and Coordinator Team consists of 14 people aged 40-60 years old. There is a significant risk that some of them could be sick for much of the summer. Losing the staff that are ultimately responsible for the running of camp, would simply be a recipe for disaster. Camp only works because we have so many checks and balances in place to minimize risk.

What does the local medical officer of health say about all of this? Could you just hire more nurses?

We have the best doctors, nurses and a dedicated staff team, but even giving out medications, dealing with isolation of infected campers or staff in a safe manner has challenges. Finding the necessary PPE and teaching our staff how to use PPE correctly is no easy task and we can't expose them to any risk. Ensuring all visitors from outside camp wear a mask is a must, but what if they don't or forget?

Our local medical officer of health who we trust and admire has said if COVID-19 is at camp, there is a chance he would have to close up camp or quarantine the entire camp at any time up to the last day of the summer. The implications of having us closed or our campers and staff not permitted to leave at the end of camp would cause more damage to your children than not holding camp in the first place.

What about our CIT Program?

Our hearts are with our 2020 CITs who have been long awaiting this special summer. We will be sending a separate e-mail in the coming weeks specifically addressing our plan and how we intend to move forward for Summer 2021.