



# Risk Management *Tips*

## An ounce of prevention

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Memories of the summer's health incidents probably trigger varying degrees of emotion among camp professionals across the nation. If it wasn't concern over H1N1, it may have been challenges with finding the right staff for the health center, getting counseling staff to responsibly manage their own health, or critical incidents that tried the resiliency of your camp's crisis response plan. Even "good" summers have stress points, especially when one considers how a different response to a critical incident may have tipped fate in a different way.

Autumn is the ideal time to process the summer with an eye toward making the future better, especially insofar as your camper and staff injury-illness experiences are concerned. However, since we're dealing with humans, let's straightforwardly acknowledge that injuries and illnesses cannot be eliminated. But what can be improved are the incidents that occur because of factors a camp professional controls such as policy statements (or lack of them), facility changes, schedule adaptations, and the rules we ask people to follow (or fail to provide).

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Here are some tips to guide your review process that should ultimately lay the groundwork for a healthier summer next season. As you work through these, notice how many transcend the walls of your camp's health center. That physical locality is the place where injuries and illnesses are cared for. To truly have a healthier summer, care and intentional interventions must exist outside those walls.

### **Review data from the health center staff**

- Go through the log. Why did people seek healthcare? Was there a difference between the camper and staff experiences? Were there times during the day or particular days of the week that seemed more likely to have injury-illness events? Were any areas of camp or specific activities likely to trigger incidents?
- Ask health center staff why they had to call parents. Consider reported reasons in view of changes that could be made to your camp's health history form and policy statements. Also consider what additional information parents might benefit from getting prior to camp.
- Review each incident that caused someone to leave camp and be seen by medical providers in the greater community. Might your camp's medical protocols be changed to minimize the need for out-of-camp referrals? Might your health center staff need training to be more discrete in making those referrals (e.g., telling the difference between a common cold and an upper respiratory infection that needs medical intervention)?
- Talk with your health center staff about their experience. What did they enjoy the most? If they could change one thing about their job, what would it be, and how would they change it? What ideas do they have for recruiting next summer's health center staff?
- Ask your health center staff if they had the equipment needed to do their job effectively. You might pick up ideas for improving healthcare delivery or hear about equipment that's inadequate, outdated, or in need of repair or replacement.
- Have the health center staff show you the daily sheets for routine medications. Get an idea of the scope of medication used by campers and staff. Pay specific attention to medication used to manage a mental, emotional, or social health need. These often have more impact in activities and cabin groups than they do in the health center.
- Ask health center staff to identify the most significant contributing factor(s) to both camper and staff injury-illness events and what you might do to improve those factors.

### **Review incident reports and other data sets**

- Workers' compensation claims, insurance claims, and internal documentation of incidents provide an indicator of what process broke down. Review these with an eye to identifying the changes needed before next summer.
- Look over the phone records from parent calls. What triggered those calls? What could be done to make them less likely to occur?
- Compare your camp's report from the American Camp Association's Healthy Camp Study with the national profile. What are your camp's strengths, and where are the stressors? This being said, remember to consider the context within which your camp incidents occurred. If your camp fairs better or worse than the national data, balance that information with the context within which your camp exists. Identify a rationale for change rather than merely changing for the novelty of change.
- Review feedback from parents and campers. What do these tell you about their perception of safety and health? Hint: If your feedback forms do not ask questions of this type, that's a problem that can be remedied for next summer, right?

### **Review information from other sources**

- Check with the food service and maintenance staff. What was the scope of special diet needs? Are there facility changes that would eliminate injury potential? What about the health needs of this staff? Did they have a healthy summer or is there a training that might benefit them (e.g., how to use knives effectively)?

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- In view of what is known about the past summer, consider what might be added or deleted from next summer's staff orientation process. For example, many camps specifically taught personal protective behaviors associated with mitigating the impact of H1N1. Since communicable diseases will always be a threat within the camp world, which of these should become institutionalized?
- Talk with your leadership staff. Front-line personnel often have ideas for improvement, especially when it comes to health topics. They deal with increasing interpersonal tensions among staff from lack of sleep, with campers' needs for alone time when camp is all about being around people, and with the tension between what a camp rule may direct and the reality of the situation.
- Consider your own notes and perspective. Perhaps you noted the impact of fatigue within the staff group. How might that insidious challenge be minimized if not eliminated? Or perhaps you noticed the tension between the need to supervise and the human need for privacy. How might those two needs find greater balance within your program?

### **Develop and implement an action plan**

Each of these areas—and others—will trigger ideas for adaptation or confirm that the current process continues to be effective. However, knowing information doesn't make any difference unless one acts on that knowledge. So make a list of change ideas and flesh out an action plan to address each one. Some will be easy to address; others may take more than a year to fully implement. The point is to start the process, and then monitor for effectiveness.

“Healthier camping for all” isn't a dream; it's a reality.

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If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at [safety1st@markelcorp.com](mailto:safety1st@markelcorp.com).