

# THE CAMPLINE

Providing Camp-Specific Knowledge on Legal, Legislative, and Risk Management Issues

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Photo courtesy of Camp Gray, Reedsburg, WI

## 2020 ACA Camp Crisis Hotline Summary

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Annually, the ACA Hotline Team provides an analysis of the kinds of hotline calls we fielded and lessons learned for camp professionals to use for staff training. Additionally, we share the most common resources we use to assist callers.

Because so many camps were unable to run during summer 2020, we had a much smaller volume of crisis hotline calls. Most of our calls were related to operational questions and clarifications related to the coronavirus pandemic.

# You Adapted To Covid-19 (So We Adapted, Too)



From virtual camps to new hygiene protocols, you had to change how you work fast. So we did the same. Between April to July, we supported our customers with:

- 37 COVID-specific webinars
- 2,953 virtual check-ins, Zoom calls and other customer engagements
- More than \$2 million in returned insurance premiums (with more to come)

**When you adapt to a crisis, we adapt to meet your needs.  
Get in touch to discuss your insurance options.**



## Field Guide for Camps

### COVID-19-Related Calls

Many of our COVID-19-related calls were due to lack of familiarity with the Environmental Health & Engineering (EH&E) [Field Guide for Camps](#). Here are the most commonly overlooked considerations when planning for mitigation and interventions due to pandemic issues:

- What are your guidelines for transporting campers by van? By bus? What if a child arrives by train or plane — is quarantine required?
- What is your plan to provide for safe physical distancing to allow campers and staff a break from their masks — especially when it is extremely hot and humid outside?
- What will you do if you discover you have an asymptomatic camper who has a COVID-19 positive sibling (who did not come to camp)?
- Are your camper screening procedures adequate to protect your campers and staff?
- Are your healthcare staff trained and equipped to keep all campers and staff safe as the summer progresses, especially if/when you have an individual test positive for the virus?
- Are your staff trained to protect the identities of individuals who may test positive from other campers, staff, and parents?

The American Camp Association partnered with the YMCA of the USA to evaluate and clarify the health

standards to which a camp would have to adhere to operate this summer. We collaboratively hired an environmental health consulting firm, EH&E, who established a panel of independent experts to provide a practical, science-based camp operations guidebook for the COVID-19 environment. The EH&E [Field Guide for Camps](#) provides updated educational resources to support camps in their decision-making process.

### COVID-19 Resources:

- [ACA's COVID-19 Resource Center for Camps](#)
- [EH&E Field Guide for Camps](#)
- [CDC Camp Planning Tool](#)
- [Association of Camp Nursing COVID-19 Considerations for Camps](#)

### Historic Incidents at Camp

We also had several calls regarding historic child abuse and serious staff-to-staff misconduct that happened at camp. Social attitudes toward past abuse and the legal environment in the US is changing, and camp professionals need to be aware. Twenty-four states passed statute of limitations reform bills in 2019, and more have been introduced. "We need to develop cultures and environments at camp where any inappropriate behavior, red flags, or rule breaking — both by campers and staff — is immediately detected and addressed before it can develop into abuse" (Trapani, 2019). Camps should consult with their own legal and insurance professionals to make sure

they are well-prepared should they receive a call related to historic abuse.

Many of those who called with historic abuse-related concerns had never considered, planned for, or asked themselves questions such as:

- Do you have multiple layers of protection in place to safeguard against abuse?
- Do you have your staff sign a code of conduct?
- Do you train your staff annually on how to recognize, prevent, and report abuse? Do your staff understand their role as mandatory reporter?
- Is your board prepared to respond to historic allegations of abuse?
- Would you know how to respond to a victim of past abuse at your camp?

### Historic Abuse Resources:

- [National Overview of Statutes of Limitation \(SOLs\) for Child Sex Abuse](#), ChildUSA
- [Sexual Abuse Prevention: Responding to 2019 Legislative Changes](#), Redwoods Group
- [Preparing for Historical Accusations of Abuse: A Board-Level Drill](#), Redwoods Group

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Trapani, K. (Fall 2019). Everything has changed: abuse prevention at camp in the age of #metoo. *The Campline*, XXX(12), 12-15.



Photo courtesy of Liberty Lake Day Camp, Bordentown, NJ

# Emergency Planning and Preparedness for Summer 2021 – Key Lessons and Takeaways Related to COVID-19

By John Carr, MS

Like many of you, I spent this summer monitoring social media for information about how the camps in my home state of Missouri were handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the social nature of camps — many people in close proximity to one another — I was worried about how they would be able to make it through the summer without an outbreak.

My work in emergency management started when I was a camp counselor, coordinating campsite evacuations and managing storm shelters during tornado watches. As I got older, I moved to working as our camp's standards coordinator. Now I teach and study emergency management, working with students who go on to be emergency

planners, nonprofit directors, and recreation facility coordinators. The pandemic brought together my love of camps and my profession. As the pandemic picked up steam, I was on the phone with our other area camps talking through our options, revising emergency plans, and making the tough decision that all of us faced.

Many camps made the difficult decision to close, citing a lack of resources or the inability to be flexible enough to adapt to the changes needed for their campers to have a safe summer. Others shifted their programming to incorporate social distancing and amped up their cleaning and wellness strategies. Some took a calculated risk to open. Although they knew they could not entirely eliminate the threat of COVID-19, their camp would not survive without their usual summer revenue. Every organization did what they felt was best to protect their campers and staff while also looking out for the future of their camps.

In short, we see what usually happens during times of disaster; folks did what they could with the resources they had available. Still, it was no surprise when the first few news stories rolled in announcing some camps were closing sessions early or ending the summer entirely.

Many camps that did open hedged their bets by undertaking rigorous, and often expensive, efforts to adapt to our new reality. Camps were given roughly four months to reengineer their entire programs to meet a set of ever-changing guidelines that were not even designed for their specific needs, but rather schools and day cares. The amount of work was monumental, and the urgency with which they needed to implement the changes was grueling.

As camps, we can only control a portion of the risk. While we can significantly reduce the risk of COVID-19 through prevention measures, we can never eliminate that risk entirely. In my day job teaching emergency management, we have what we call the Swiss Cheese model of risk. If every prevention effort you put in place is a slice of swiss cheese, the holes represent a mistake or a gap in coverage. You create paperwork, but someone might

forget to turn it in. You have a process in place, but a counselor may get distracted and skip a step. We know that mistakes happen, so we have multiple prevention efforts in place. But when multiple gaps in coverage line up, that is when a failure in the system occurs.

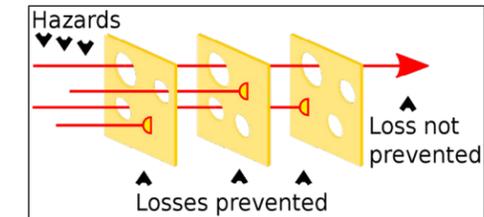


Figure 1 Swiss Cheese Model of Risk (TO BE REPLACED WITH ACA MADE GRAPHIC)

Some camps this summer had a long list of measures in place. They:

- Tested campers and had repeat physicals upon arrival
- Took temperatures each morning
- Mandated masks
- Eliminated as many common spaces as possible to minimize exposure
- Followed strict processes for quarantining patients

Yet, even with such careful actions, camps *still* had individuals test positive.

Those camps that made it through the summer without any cases had one very important thing in common: they were lucky.

By *lucky* I mean that the highly likely event of a positive case just hadn't happened yet. Luck is the colloquial way of saying *likelihood*, changed so that we can tell ourselves there was nothing we could do about it. Similar to *hope*, *luck* is neither a strategy nor a course of action. When it comes to the hard data of risk management, the only way we can truly reduce our risk is through preventative actions, with every action taken gradually decreasing our risk.





Photo courtesy of MedCamps of Louisiana, West Monroe, LA

Taking these preventative actions is not always easy. With COVID-19, the deck was stacked against us. Camps are social by nature. The first thing on every camp's website is that classic photo of a circle of happy kids, arm in arm, enjoying the spectacular program the staff offers. How do you take that experience and remove the hands-on team building, the high fives from counselors, and the hugs at the end of a session? How do you make sure a camper gets the life-changing experience camps strive for while telling them to keep their distance from others?

Simply put, there are things we cannot control. We cannot control whether our campers follow our suggested quarantine before they arrive. We cannot control the honesty, or lack thereof, on a self-report survey about symptoms. We cannot control the regulations our area's government bodies put in place. We cannot control their individual actions; we can only control our facility's response.

As we look to next summer, a number of new developments may work in our favor. First, we will have an entire year's worth of data, scientific research, and better-developed guiding documents.

In March, I found myself frantically searching for guidance on how to help my camp prepare for the summer. The best I could find was a pink eye containment plan from a neighboring facility — not exactly a solution for a global pandemic. By early summer there was still very little information out there, and even less that was specific to camps. Now, thanks to the efforts of the American Camp Association and the YMCA of the USA, we now have the [Field Guide for Camps on Implementation of CDC Guidance](#), a critical document to have read as you make adjustments for next summer.

What we know about COVID-19 continues to be refined by researchers. As we started the 2020 season the numbers were all over the board, with confusion over the length of time the virus could live on surfaces and estimates ranging anywhere from hours to weeks depending on the environment. Scientists now have had time to study the virus and are able to give more specific information about how it is spread. As we move to the 2021 camp season, the specificity of this information will continue to grow.

Our campers and families will also have had a year to adjust to our new reality. When the pandemic began, many school districts simply closed for the remainder of the year, making our camps the testing ground for the "new normal." Campers were having to undergo a rough transition from their regular lives of school and socializing to a foreign environment of masks and social distancing. Now many schools have taken the same precautions your organizations did this summer, so next summer these behaviors should be more engrained in the culture.

We also have some new resources in our toolbox, and new approaches that schools and organizations are refining during the academic year:

- **Cohort-based planning** — Schools are arranging classes to keep individuals in modular groups that are siloed from other cohorts. If done correctly, this will minimize those exposed to the cohort and their assigned staff members should there be an outbreak. The key here is making sure that any camp-wide staff (food service, ranger, facilities) do not come in contact with campers, as they could easily be the carrier from cohort to cohort. This was an important lesson that many skilled nursing facilities learned over the spring and summer months.

If your facility has employees who regularly make the rounds to see all groups or individuals at the facility, they can also be the quickest method of exposure to the virus.

- **Open access trainings** — While the specific needs of your organization vary according to size and type of program you offer, without a doubt there are relevant trainings freely accessible to you right now. Sources including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Johns Hopkins University are constantly rolling out new guides and trainings focused on specific tasks that your organization may be carrying out. While less relevant to smaller organizations, large camps could certainly benefit from the [Johns Hopkins Contact Tracing Course](#). This training has become the foundation of many organizations' COVID-19 response efforts. At a more basic level, the CDC offers countless videos, information sheets, and resources for all types of organizations, including [suggestions for youth and summer camps](#).
- **New studies and lessons learned** — As we continue through the academic year and get closer to next summer, we will see more stories pop up with "lessons learned" about how to manage COVID-19. Be sure to follow news stories about facilities similar to yours. Learning from others' experience is useful. What happened at their facility, and could it happen to yours? What new approaches are facilities taking that you could adopt at your camp? What are the weak spots in your organization's armor, and how are other places fixing it?
- **ACA webinars, conferences, and publications** — If you are reading this you have a strong

supporter in your corner. As the pandemic gained momentum last spring, ACA immediately began offering webinars with some of the top experts in the country. These webinars covered a wide range of topics including public health and hygiene, employment law, emergency planning, and international visas. As we get closer to the 2021 camp season, keep an eye out for additional ACA webinars.

These resources are great, but they will not protect your camp unless you use them! You — as camp directors, as staff, as stakeholders in your camp — *need to take action now*. Use this off-season to address what might be the most important tool in your toolbox: your camp's emergency plan. Engage your key staff members and your local stakeholders and identify what to do if and when your camp sees a positive COVID-19 case next summer. What elements did not work this summer? What challenges did you face that you had not accounted for? Engage your stakeholders, revise your plan, and run drills of that plan to make sure your camp can do what it needs to when the time comes. Now is the time to get started. Remember, it is planning and preparation, not luck, that will get you through next summer.

*John Carr, MS, is an emergency planner and educator from Maryville, Missouri. He serves as Emergency and Disaster Management program coordinator at Northwest Missouri State University, teaching courses related to emergency management and facility emergency planning. Carr also serves as director for the Center for Camp Safety and Emergency Preparedness, developing research and publications for camps across the country. For more information on the Center and their emergency planning resources, go to [ReadyCamp.org](#).*



# GUIDELINES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR REOPENING CAMP FOOD SERVICES AMID COVID-19

By Kimberly Whiteside Truitt

COVID-19 has brought many changes to our camps. As we look forward to the 2021 camp season, there are many new regulations required for reopening and maintaining food service operations. To provide a safe environment for our campers and staff to look forward to, consider these compiled guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Occupational Safety and Health Administrations (OSHA), and ServSafe/National Restaurant Association.

## Preparation for Reopening Your Food Service

### 1. Prepare Your Facility

Your facilities have likely remained vacant and equipment unused for some months. Unfortunately, system breakdowns can occur from this. Systems to evaluate and preparation measures follow.

#### Overall Evaluation

- First, check ventilation systems, air ducts, and vents in the facility

to ensure they are clean, free of mold, and operating properly.

- Check for proper function of water faucets and drinking fountains. Ill-functioning water systems are a risk for disease.
- Increased outdoor air circulation decreases COVID-19 risk. Use of fans can be helpful, but do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to campers.
- Examine gas services, electrical, lighting, ventilation, hood systems for fire prevention, garbage

areas, and toilet facilities to be sure all are functional.

- Restrooms, waiting areas, and all other areas need to be properly cleaned, stocked, sanitized, and disinfected.
- Ensure there is no pest infestation and that all pest control measures are working.

#### Water, Plumbing, and Ice

Check to be certain that:

- Potable water is available throughout the facility.
- Water and sewage lines are working.
- There is hot and cold water.
- All water lines are flushed, including equipment water lines and connections, according to manufacturer instructions.
- Ice machines and bins are cleaned and sanitized.
- Handwashing sinks are working properly and can reach 100°F minimum.

#### Food Temperature Control

- Be certain that coolers, freezers, and hot and cold holding units are working properly.
- Clean and sanitize coolers, freezers, and hot and cold holding units.
- Use accurately calibrated thermometers to check equipment and product temperatures to ensure food safety / hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) plans are followed.

#### Product Inspection, Rotation

- Check food for spoilage, damage, expiration, or evidence of tampering or pest activity, and dispose if needed.
- Label and organize with

receiving date and rotate to use older products first.

- Properly store all food, packaging, and chemicals to protect from cross contamination.
- Contact suppliers in the supply chain to ensure scheduled deliveries will be able to be fulfilled.

#### Commercial Dishwashing Equipment

- Clean and equip your three-compartment sink with detergent and sanitizer.
- Ensure your commercial dishwasher is clean, functioning, and equipped with detergent and sanitizer (single-temperature machine, 165°F) or reaches 180°F rinse (high temperature).
- Have sanitizer test strips available and confirm the test strips appropriate for the sanitizer being used.

### 2. Establish Employee Health/Screening Policies

- Have a procedure in place for monitoring employee health and personal hygiene practices.
- Ensure you are following CDC guidance and practices for employee health checks/screenings, which include:
  - Prescreen by assessing symptoms and taking temperature.
  - Ask workers to report any safety and health concerns.
  - Encourage employees to stay home if sick.
  - Send sick workers home immediately. Clean and disinfect their workstations and consider others with close contact exposed. Follow [CDC guidelines](#).
- Check CDC and local regulatory/health authority guidance for

employees returning to work (i.e., quarantine regulations).

- Require your employees to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and/or cloth face coverings over their nose and mouth to prevent spread of the virus. Be consistent on your policy for and maintain an adequate supply of PPE.
- Suggest other means of transportation to employees who commute by ride sharing or public transportation, or allow them to change shifts to times with fewer commuters. This will lessen contact with others, as well as the possibility of contracting COVID-19.

### 3. Train Employees

Staff safety training including new COVID-19 regulations must include all employees. This may be done via online sources or in person provided that social distancing is maintained. Staff training should include the following procedures.

#### Handwashing Stations

Train and remind employees of proper hand hygiene practices:

- “Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap. Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds” (CDC, 2020). Rinse.
- Handwashing should be done by all employees:
  - when entering the facility from outside
  - after removing gloves
  - after touching their eyes, nose, or mouth
  - after smoking or going to the bathroom

- after touching a contaminated surface
- before eating
- after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Keep handwashing sinks accessible and fully stocked with soap, paper towels, hand wash sign, and trash cans.
- Place paper towels and trash receptacles in restrooms next to the doors so they can be opened and closed without touching the handles.

### Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Sanitizing Food Contact and Nonfood Contact Surfaces

- Clean and disinfect surfaces frequently handled using EPA-approved disinfectants that have label claims against the coronavirus as frequently as possible and as often as food safety regulations require. Examples are worktables, door handles, sink handles, and bathroom stalls. Allow the disinfectant to stay on the surface for the manufacturer-recommended time, but ensure product residue is not left on surfaces to avoid allergic reactions or chemical ingestion.

- Food contact surface and food preparation surfaces should be washed, rinsed, and sanitized using an EPA-approved sanitizer for food contact surfaces.
- For blood or bodily fluid cleanup or deep cleaning due to possible SARS-CoV-2 contamination, wash, rinse, and disinfect per disinfectant label instructions. Sanitize using a food-contact surface sanitizer.
- Schedule a routine cleaning and disinfection. Be certain cleaning agents and disinfectants are stored away from foods and guests in proper storage areas. Ensure you are stocked with cleaners and disinfectants for ongoing cleaning and disinfection needs.
- Gloves should always be used during garbage bag removal and trash disposal.
- Wash hands after removing gloves and after handling dirty dishes and other used food service objects.
- If possible, offer single-use disposable items such as plates, cups, bowls, and utensils.
- If disposables cannot be used, ensure

dinnerware and flatware are washed with dish detergent and hot water.

- Be certain restrooms are cleaned and disinfected more frequently than typical.
- Place hand sanitizers (minimum 60 percent alcohol) in various locations to promote hand hygiene in addition to handwashing.

## 4. Determine and Communicate Layouts and Procedures

### A. Dining Area Inform guests of these dining policies on the camp website and/or posted signs:

- Table seating must ensure that all guests sit a minimum of six feet apart. Mark tables and chairs that are not to be used.
- Seating capacity must be restricted to accommodate social distancing.
- Discourage crowded waiting areas by planning separate:
  - Meal times (with smaller numbers of campers)
  - Arrival times
  - Entrances
  - Eating areas

- Offer outdoor seating if possible.
- Offer staggered dining times to limit number of campers and to accommodate social distancing in the dining hall.
- Discourage campers from sharing items such as food, drinks, and disposable utensils, etc.
- Remove high-touch self-service containers and items requiring frequent hand contact, such as ketchup bottles, salt/pepper shakers, and other condiments.
- Supply single-serving condiments and touchless trash cans.
- Avoid offering any self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets, salad bars, and drink stations. Safer serving styles include a socially distanced serving line with smaller numbers of guests or seating guests and serving them at the table.
- Restrict outside food and beverage containers from being brought in by campers and staff to avoid cross contamination.

### B. Concession Stand Operations

- Consider offering concession stand operations at staggered times, with staff assisting campers with social distancing in lines. Plan for employees to work six feet apart.
- To allow touchless payment options, consider offering a prepurchased concession plan with registration, perhaps as part of the camper fee. This plan could, for example, allow for a \$5 concession purchase per day, per camper. Menu prices would need to be basic, such as \$2 for all drinks, \$1 for candy items or chips, simplifying the process for all while still allowing a concessions experience.
- Have concession employees place food and drink items on the

counter, asking the camper to wait until completely placed before collecting their items. This will avoid direct hand-to-hand contact.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched counter surfaces.

## 5. Regulate Social Distancing via Physical Guides and Barriers

- Install physical guides for social distancing, such as tape on floors and sidewalks. Place signage on walls reminding campers and staff to allow at least a six-foot distance between themselves and all others. Place these guides where guests form lines and in the kitchen.
- Outline distances of six feet between employees and campers in dining areas with floor tape. If using serving lines, install barriers such as plexiglass sneeze guards and partitions, if feasible.
- Limit the number of employees in shared spaces, such as the kitchen, offices, and break rooms, to allow six feet of space between individuals. Schedule break room use in intervals, cleaning and disinfecting between each use.
- Restrict sharing of food, tools, equipment, and supplies by employees.
- Provide adequate supplies for your employees to limit sharing frequently touched tools and utensils in the kitchen. If this is impossible, clean and disinfect between uses of shared supplies.

## 6. Communication and Guideline Changes

Your guests may have questions about your COVID-19 procedures, or even a concern while on site. A staff person for each shift should be delegated for responding to COVID-19 questions, with contact information

available to all staff members.

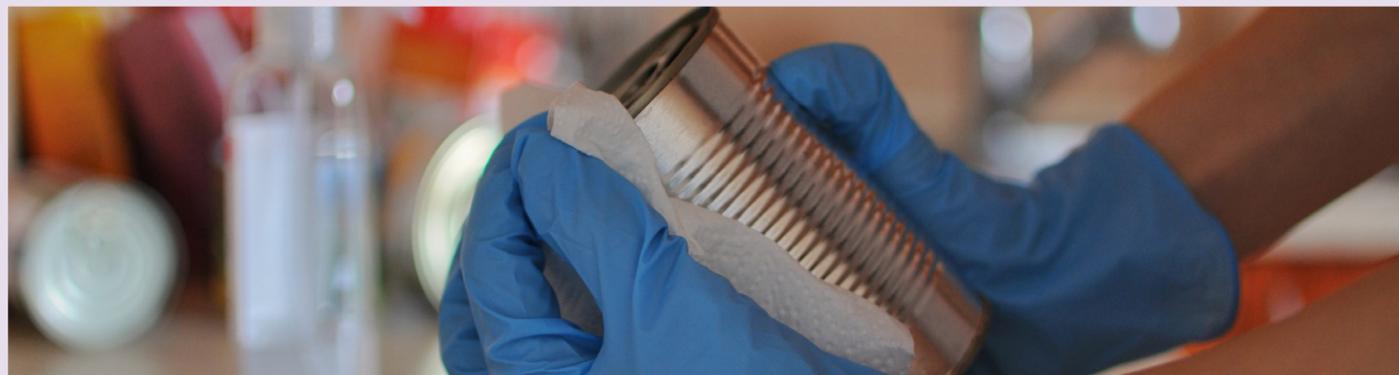
The rise and fall of pandemic cases continue to change daily, so be aware that local regulatory/health authorities will likely change restriction levels for food services and the public. When these authorities eliminate restriction levels, continue to follow and monitor guidelines to the best of your ability for the safety of campers and staff. Check your state's [specific guidelines for reopening](#).

*Kimberly Whiteside Truitt writes from experience as a camp food service manager and presented at the 2020 North American Camp Food Service and Maintenance Conference. She is married to Thomas and Mom to Eagle Scouts Harrison and Ben.*

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## Food Safety Precautions in the COVID-19 Era and Beyond

By Deadra Barnett

Food safety is paramount. Our food supply is the lifeline of our entire world and came as close to collapse as it ever has in living memory during the height of the COVID-19 emergence. Key steps are being taken to maintain the integrity of products being offered to customers as well as maintaining the safety of the people making those products. Camps should be aware of the following practices when choosing food suppliers and during food preparation at their own facilities:

1. Know who and where your product is coming from. Food suppliers have robust supplier approval programs in place. This ensures that the vendors we purchase from are adhering to all applicable regulations and any necessary additional measures. Suppliers are vetted for good manufacturing practices, pest control, allergen control, quality control, and several other standards. Buying from vendors that uphold these standards will help ensure a safe, better-quality product.
2. Don't overlook or put aside known food safety hazards. It's easy to forget known risks such as temperature control in the effort to maintain the new COVID-19 restrictions. Keep foods out of the danger zones. Maintain temperature requirements from receiving to serving.
3. Sanitation. Sanitation. Sanitation. Sanitary conditions are known to be a key component of food safety. Keeping the standards high for cleanliness and sanitation is crucial now — and not just on food prep surfaces. The same cleanliness habits that minimize foodborne illnesses can minimize the cross-contact areas between associates as well, such as ensuring common areas and touch points are sanitized multiple times a day in every area of a facility in addition to stringent sanitation throughout the food-processing areas.
4. Stress the importance of employee health. Many illnesses are foodborne. Standard practice for employees at food-processing facilities and camps alike should always be if you're not feeling well, don't report to work. This is now even more important. While studies currently don't show COVID-19 being foodborne, your employees can absolutely spread it among themselves. Screening employees for temperature and symptoms via questionnaire at the door has become part of daily life at facilities. We've seen the results and fallout in the meat industry of how quickly the virus can spread within a group.
5. Start with good product to end with good product. You can't make treasure from trash, especially in fresh produce. To keep our products fresh, appetizing, and high quality for as long as possible, we have to start with quality raw ingredients. For example, cucumbers that are soft are not going to be servable just a few days out. Keep shelf life and ripeness guides in mind for produce items as well to keep product quality optimal at the serving point.
6. Use individually packaged items to limit contact and congregation points. Individually packaged (IP) items have gotten a bad reputation in the reusability and sustainability department due to high volumes of waste where there are other alternatives. However, individually portioned items can decrease contact points throughout the serving line, and they are portable enough to ship, pack, carry, and deliver in several configurations.

In the current climate, worrying about a safe food source is the last thing any of us wants to do. Knowing our food is as safe and easily accessible as ever gives everyone a sense of security that we need right now.

*Deadra Barnett is a project manager for DNO Produce.*



Photo courtesy of Stoney Creek Ranch, New Ulm, TX

## FACIAL-RECOGNITION SOFTWARE AT CAMP: THE BENEFITS AND CONCERNS

By Marcia Ellett

Facial-recognition software is quickly becoming a mainstay in both the tech and consumer worlds. Among its capabilities, law enforcement and security personnel use it to track down criminals, social media uses it to tag posted photos automatically, and smartphone users unlock their phones and apps without the nuisance of having to type in a password or scan a fingerprint. And increasingly, camps are using facial-recognition software to identify and deliver photos of happy campers in the midst of their

summertime fun for the benefit of curious and/or anxious parents at home.

But what are the implications for camps of using facial-recognition software? Here's a rundown of some of the benefits and concerns of using this technology.

### Benefits

"Camps are happy because they're getting a lot of positive feedback from parents," said Rob Burns, president of Bunk1, a company that partners with summer camps across the US and Canada to offer families a simple way of

staying connected with their campers.

"We've never gone to market to just sell facial recognition," Burns said. "It's a benefit of the bigger picture. What we're really selling is a parent engagement platform and the ability to make the parents feel like they know what's going on at camp and understand the value of the camp experience." Bunk1 reports more than 160,000 parents use its software every summer.

In 2019, Waldo Photos, another vendor of facial-recognition software services working with more than 150 camps in



Photo courtesy of YMCA Camp Shady Brook, Deckers, CO

North America, found and delivered (via text to cell phones) 3,311,750 photos through their platform, according to the Waldo Photos company website (2020).

That's the crux of it: ease of use for both parents and camps, and peace of mind for parents.

The facial-recognition program is a user-friendly system. "A camp photographer uploads photos from a mobile app or desktop to our system and makes the photos live," explained Burns. "Our system automatically scans for matches and notifies parents when a photo of their child has been found. It all happens pretty instantly."

Parents of campers at camps using the Bunk1 facial-recognition platform have to opt in to the service and provide a photo of their child(ren) for matching purposes.

"They receive push notifications of new photos of their children and we're asking the parents to confirm or deny if that's Johnny in the picture," said Burns. "This way, the company has statistics on accuracy directly from the parents."

"Camps are using the technology to more easily share all the photos that they were previously posting on Facebook or other online albums," said Lindsay Nash, director of content at Waldo Photos, in 2018 (Kay, 2018).

At CampGroup's Lake of the Woods and Greenwood Camps, which serve around 1,250 campers each summer and where use of facial-recognition software to identify camper photos is provided as an optional service, "not one family has expressed concern" about its use, said Dayna Hardin, president of CampGroup.

"We all know that many parents wait anxiously for the daily photos to be posted from camp," Hardin said. "We wanted to give parents an easier way to see their child(ren) at camp. Prior to facial recognition, parents had to scroll through 300–500 photos a day in hopes of seeing a photo of their child. There is nothing more fun than receiving photos pushed to your cell phone of your child while he/she is away at camp. And the campers were not impacted by this change [to using a facial-recognition platform] because there was no difference in how we took daily photos of them."

Hardin said her organization also wanted to be able to keep track daily of how many photos each camper appeared in. The software's

administrative app allows camps to see how many photos they've uploaded of each camper, so they can make sure they have an appropriate number of every child attending.

This ability to ensure multiple photographs of each child at camp also means regular communication with parents. Said Burns, "Open rates on email are very low these days. This gives camps an opportunity to engage with parents in a different way."

### Concerns

*Washington Post* reporter Drew Harwell wrote in August of 2019 that "No national law regulates facial-recognition software. But Federal Trade Commission regulators said . . . they were considering updates to the country's online child privacy rules that would designate kids' faces, among other biometric data, as 'personal information' protected under federal law." That same month, the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit ruled that Facebook users could sue the company for its use of facial-recognition technology to identify people in photos without their consent (Harwell, 2019).

Outside the camp world, "Consumers are increasingly concerned about how their data is being collected and used," Missouri Senator Roy Blunt said in a statement. "That's why we need guardrails to ensure that, as this technology continues to develop, it is implemented responsibly" (Birnbaum, 2019).

"Privacy advocates have raised the alarm on facial-recognition software over its ability to quickly identify people from a distance without their knowledge or consent — a power used increasingly by police and federal investigators to track down suspects or witnesses to a crime," Harwell wrote. Some cities in the US, including San Francisco, have banned the surveillance technology's use by public

officials and police (Harwell, 2019).

Where camps are concerned, Harwell said, "The face-scanning technology also has sparked an existential tension at many camps: How do you give kids a safe place to develop their identity and independence, while also offering the constant monitoring that modern parents increasingly demand?"

Some child and adolescent therapists, including Katie Hurley, worry that this voyeuristic practice so many parents have adopted could be detrimental in the long run. "How can our kids ever learn to be autonomous when we're always tracking and monitoring them?" Hurley asked.

The constant peek allowed into their children's camp lives through facial-recognition software, though meant to calm parents' fears about their children's summertime experiences, can also have the opposite effect on some individuals. Harwell reported that "Liz Young, a longtime camp director . . . said she now fields as many concerned-parent calls in two hours as she used to get all month — mostly from parents asking how their kids look on camera or whether they're being photographed enough" (Harwell, 2019).

One final concern with facial-recognition software: misidentifications do happen, and such errors are increasingly being recognized as a civil rights issue. There is a growing concern that identification errors by these software programs occur "in part because the systems are trained on data sets that are themselves skewed," said Geoffrey Fowler, technology columnist for *The Washington Post* (Fowler, 2020). "Accuracy disparities mean already marginalized communities face the brunt of misidentifications," said Joy Buolamwini, founder of the Algorithmic Justice League. "But the point isn't just that facial-recognition systems can misidentify faces, it's that the technology itself can be used in biased

ways by governments or corporations" (Fowler, 2020) — or even camps if vigilance is not maintained.

### Advice

Owners and leaders weighing the pros and cons of implementing facial-recognition technology at their camps and deciding to take the plunge should keep The Redwoods Group Senior Consultant Katie Johnson's advice in mind: "Since these are typically third-party vendors, our thought would be to vet/verify the security of the vendor through written agreements. The agreement should outline what the vendor can and can't do with the photos (storage, selling to another vendor, etc.) and who ultimately owns the photos. Camps should have legal counsel review the contract prior to signing to ensure their property (photos, videos) is protected."

*Marcia Ellett is the Editor in Chief of Camping Magazine.*

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