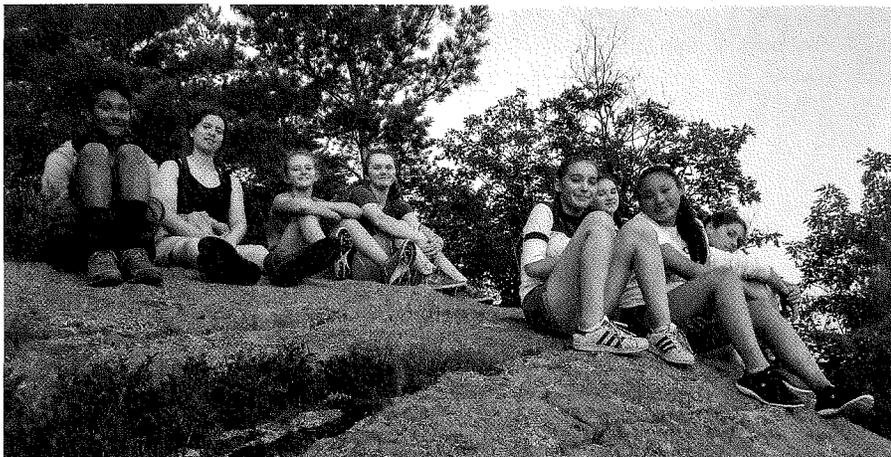


prepping for Summer Camp

WITH SUMMER ON THE HORIZON thousands of children are getting ready to head to some type of camp. New York's Adirondacks and Catskills are home to over two thousand children's camps. According to the State Department of Health, nearly one million New York children take part in summer camp pro-



Courtesy of Willow Hill Farm

grams. These programs range from truly rugged expeditions in deep wilderness to facilities that could rival luxury spas. With costs ranging from minimal or none (for some government or agency operations) to those comparable to college tuition, there truly are camp experiences available to every child in our state.

Camps may play an important role in children's health. Richard Louv, author of the amazing book *Last Child in the Woods*, makes the compelling argument that lack of outdoor time is contributing to such scourges as ADHD and obesity in our youngest children. A positive camp experience could literally be life-changing for some children. Indeed, I got my start in a lifetime of outdoor sports while attending an Adirondack Scout camp as a young boy.

Is it safe to send a child to camp in New York State? It sure is. All such facilities are subject to a host of regulatory requirements and inspections by state or local health departments.

The Department of Health has been maintaining a database on camp injuries or illnesses for many years. These data are publicly available through the department's website, www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/camps.

The most common camp injuries are fractures and lacerations—the most common injuries occurring in children of comparable age anywhere. The camp activities in which fractures are most likely to occur are not hiking or “high adventure” events but rather field and court sports. Just like home!

Similarly, outbreaks of illnesses in summer camps are no different from those occurring in schools or daycare: head lice, impetigo, strep throat, and the like. Interestingly, the most common illness outbreaks, by far, in the last two years for which reports are available were intestinal infections. With over four hundred cases in both 2013 and 2014, contagious gastroenteritis was more common than all other illnesses combined.

Why do I say “interestingly”? As any reader familiar with my research and writings knows, I have long regarded the concentration on drinking water sources as the culprit in backcountry diarrhea as bunk, believing that the focus should be more on personal hygiene—as it is in such illnesses everywhere else. The drinking water sources in New York summer camps are tested and regulated. These outbreaks are not caused by water. What else would one expect when placing a bunch of kids together for weeks at a time, without mothers reminding them to “wash your hands”?

How should you prepare your child for a camp experience? First of all, make sure all required immunizations are up to date; in New York, camps will insist on this anyway. If your child is taking a medication, make sure you connect with the camp in advance to ensure that everything is in place for this to continue during his or her stay. Some medications (such as asthma inhalers or EpiPens® for allergy) should really be carried by the child, not stored at some location at the camp. Make sure that this is the case, and that your child knows how to use his or her medication. If your child has a serious food allergy, make sure the camp has policies to ensure prevention of exposure to the allergen.

Be sure to pack sunscreen and insect repellent with your child's goodies. Some camps have specific policies about these, which you may want to check in advance.

Finally, remember the one thing that may prevent the most common illness at summer camp: “Suzie and Johnny, we love you very much and want you to enjoy camp. Wash your hands before eating, and after you use the bathroom!” ▲

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