

COVID-19 and Virtual Program Decision

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1: Why did we need to make the decision so early in the year. Couldn't we have waited a bit longer to see how things progressed?

A1: Although we remain hopeful that things will progress in a positive way, the simple fact that our mission is to safely serve children with cancer remains unchanged. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continue to list children with cancer as a high-risk population that should “*limit their interactions with other people as much as possible*”. Members of our Health and Wellness Advisory Committee, which include our partners at University of Vermont Medical’s Pediatric Oncology Department carefully weighed the current data and future projections related to the pandemic and felt strongly that the risk of infection was too high for us to operate in person for 2021. It became clear through our research that even if we waited to make a decision, it would be the same one. Camp Ta-Kum-Ta is simply not able to safely offer our programs in-person until vaccinations are available for the children we serve and their families. This decision will be revisited for any potential changes on a regular basis throughout 2021.

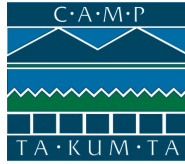
Q2: Why did we have to decide on all of the programs for the year at once?

A2: Vaccine trials for children under the age of 16 are not scheduled to be resulted until later this year at the earliest, and trials in immune-compromised individuals not until next year. Knowing this, we felt that it made the most sense to remain virtual for the entire year of 2021. This decision will be revisited for any potential changes on a regular basis throughout 2021.

Q3: What were the key determining factors that lead to the decision to cancel all in-person programs for the year?

A3: Camp Ta-Kum-Ta prides itself on its ability to offer safe programs for our children and their families. They key determining factors used to make this decision included:

- Our organizational mission and values,
- Our ability to minimize life-threatening risks,
- Our partnership with University of Vermont Medical’s Pediatric Oncology Department,
- The overall health and wellbeing of our children and their families,
- The overall health and wellbeing of our volunteers.



Q4: Given that camp is basically a “closed ecosystem” once everyone is there couldn’t we, between testing (before and ongoing), vaccinations, etc. have created a safe COVID free environment for the week?

A4: Based on the American Camping Association’s research (*Camp Counts 2020*), the data showed that there is no such thing as a “closed ecosystem”. Camps that executed the best possible preventive measures still had incidents of infection and spread. As a result, their 2021 *Field Guide for Camps on Implementation of CDC Guidance* infers that infection is inevitable and that camps must take appropriate steps to reduce potential exposure and spread AND prepare for an outbreak. Because we serve a CDC defined high-risk population, we would not be able to guarantee the safety of our children or their families.

Q5: Did we consider other alternatives such as:

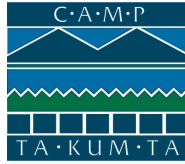
- a. A hybrid approach where those that were comfortable and cleared to attend in person could do so and those that could not, or chose not to could attend virtually. Understanding that we want to be inclusive but the virtual program doesn’t seem to be attracting a large number of campers so a hybrid approach may actually include more.
- b. Day camp only, staff remains but campers return home each day.
- c. A shortened week to allow for staff quarantining and adequate testing.

A5: These approaches were considered as follows:

- a. *Hybrid approach* – In order for Camp Ta-Kum-Ta to remain true to its mission, inclusivity is paramount. Although in-person programming is not possible, we are exploring ways to serve all of our campers and their families regardless of their virtual participation.
- b. *Day Camp* – based on the ACA’s *Camp Counts 2020* data, day camps were at greater risk of infection and spread and as such, is not an option.
- c. *Shortened Week* – for reasons listed in Q3 above, in-person programming presents risks we are unwilling to take.

Q6: It feels like we have adopted an “all or nothing” approach and if we continue that will we ever reach a state where we can be 100% sure one of the campers will not contract COVID from attending? What threshold do we need to achieve?

A6: Camp Ta-Kum-Ta remains committed to providing challenging and extraordinary experiences in a safe and loving environment for children who have or have had cancer and their families. Based on the strong recommendation from the Health and Wellness Advisory Committee, we will remain virtual until vaccinations are available for the children we serve and their families and some level of herd immunity within the greater community exists. This decision will be continually evaluated as new information becomes available. We will happily change course and offer in-person programs if things change.



Q7: What are other COCA-I camps doing? Is this a unified approach or have others found an acceptable alternative?

A7: The Children's Oncology Camping Association International (COCA-I) has not provided direct guidance related to in-person programming. Each camp is left to make decisions based on their mission and the guidance received from the CDC, ACA, local and state governments. Because missions vary, unlike Camp Ta-Kum-Ta, a couple of COCA-I camps have made the decision to offer in-person programs this summer. The vast majority have either decided to remain virtual for 2021 or have yet to announce a decision.

Q8: Why did we need to also cancel the programs for siblings and parents?

A8: For reasons outlined in A4, COVID-19 infections would be inevitable regardless of the population served. As such, we did not feel it was safe for our siblings and parents/guardians to participate in-person and then return home to potentially expose their high-risk child battling cancer. This decision will be continually evaluated as new information becomes available. We will happily change course and offer in-person programs if things change.

Q9: Can we do an in-person Staff Development Weekend (volunteer training) for those comfortable with attending?

A9: If the volunteers were to gather in person, the same risks outlined in A4 would be possible. To provide an inclusive experience for our volunteers, we will remain virtual for our staff trainings until it's safe to gather in person. This decision will be continually evaluated as new information becomes available. We will happily change course and offer in-person programs if things change.

Q10: As a volunteer, if the virtual platform really isn't for me and I choose not to participate will that affect my standing if I apply when live programming returns?

A10: Absolutely not. Camp Ta-Kum-Ta deeply values its volunteers and recognizes that the virtual platform will not work for everyone. We will happily welcome our volunteers back once we are able to safely be in-person.