

e-News for Camp Directors & Nurses

The Needling Problem of Vaccination



Last month, we wrote, "There should be no staff or campers on campsites without required immunization because the last thing you want this summer is an outbreak of a communicable disease, but is that feasible?" Here are some considerations:

Each province sets its own immunization standards and in Ontario, each local Health Unit determines which illnesses are reportable to it. We'll use an Ontario camp as an illustration of what to consider.

If a camp requires all its campers and staff to be immunized, it would minimize the chance of illness during the camp from those communicable diseases against which they have been vaccinated and the necessity to report them to the MOH (according to the *Common Childhood Illnesses* brochure produced by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, chickenpox, German measles, meningitis, mumps, red measles and whooping cough are all reportable illnesses).

However, a camp might consider that parents who have religious or conscientious objections to vaccinations either wouldn't send their children to a camp that required vaccination or might argue that they are entitled to send their unvaccinated children to camp, just as they are entitled to send them to school. What percentage of the population might this be? According to an abstract of the study *Compulsory School-Entry Vaccination Laws and Exemptions: Who Is Opting Out in Ontario and Why Does It Matter?*¹ in Ontario, for the school years 2004 to 2006, "the overall immunization exemption rate is low: less than 2%". The ratio of non-medical (conscience or religious belief) to medical exemptions (proven immunity) ranged from 1.5 to 1.75, varying with the vaccine.

Even though a camp is not governed by the *Immunization of School Pupils Act*, and students aren't usually in such close proximity as campers or for such time periods (not usually sharing all meals and sleeping accommodations for two weeks), a camp might want to parallel the Act, deciding whether it would:

- advise all parents that it accepts unvaccinated children and on what terms;
- require either vaccinations for, or exemptions from, the same illnesses as are listed in the Act (by the way, effective Jul 1, 2014, meningococcal disease, pertussis (whooping cough) and varicella (chickenpox) were added as required vaccinations for the 2014/2015 school year).
- require a copy of the "statement of conscience or religious belief" or "statement of medical exemption" on file with the MOH for the child's school district;
- advise parents of unvaccinated children that, in the event of one of those illnesses occurring during the camp, their children might have to be sent home (the Act permits the MOH to order students who haven't been vaccinated due to conscience or religious belief excluded from schools where there has been an outbreak or an immediate risk of one)

There is also a difference between a camp accepting a non-vaccinated camper (on the basis that although camping means much closer quarters than attending school, an exemption that is good enough for the school board is good enough for the camp) and hiring a non-vaccinated person as a staff member. The *raison d'être* of a camp isn't to provide health care, but it has a duty to keep the campers healthy. Does it fail if one of its staff brings a communicable illness into the camp because she or he isn't vaccinated?

¹ Healthc Policy. May 2010; 5(4): 37-46, an abstract being found at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2875891/>

...and related to that needling problem:

- First day health screening should be done by a health professional with a well-planned checklist;
- There should be a procedure for dealing with staff or campers who arrive with signs/symptoms of illness;
- The parents should know what that procedure is so that they are not caught unawares if their child is returned to them.

Have a safe, happy summer