



COVID Update - March 2021

Shalom Ramah New England,

Summer is around the corner, and we know that many of you have questions about where things stand for kayitz (summer) 2021. Below is an update on where things stand now. As you know, this situation is very fluid, and we will continue to update you as we learn more. Please visit our [Camp Ramah Overnight Camp](#) and [DC Day Camp](#) COVID pages for more information.

Here is our March update with general Ramah New England announcements first, then sections for Camp Ramah New England overnight camp and Ramah Day Camp Greater DC. We are busy preparing for a marvelous summer!

Ramah New England Update:

By whom and how is Ramah being advised about medical and behavioral issues?

A. Each Ramah camp has its own medical committee that includes several camp doctors and nurses. The Ramah New England committee is chaired by Dr. Steven Schwartz, a family physician from the DC area, and Dr. Michael Agus, the Chief of the Critical Care Division at Boston Children's Hospital. Their biographies can be found in our [FAQs](#). The chairs of the medical committees of all Ramah camps make up the National Ramah Medical Committee, which is chaired by Dr. Cliff Nerwin.

These committees also rely on the guidance, advice and expertise of consultants provided through the American Camp Association, AMSkier Insurance, JCamp180/Grinspoon Foundation, Foundation for Jewish Camp and Massachusetts Camping Association, among others. We have heard from the medical teams of camps that operated last summer, day schools across the US, infectious disease experts, and many others.

In regard to mental health and behavioral challenges, the same groups have provided a great deal of helpful guidance. In addition, we have been working all year with our camp psychologist, Dr. Alan Jacobson, and our camper care team to develop plans for supporting and nurturing our campers and staff. The directors of camper care from all the Ramah camps meet on a regular basis to plan and discuss best practices. We have been hearing from experts in the field and have talked to schools about what they are experiencing.

Will staff be required to have a COVID-19 vaccination prior to camp?

A. We are hopeful that nearly all of our staff will be vaccinated by the time camp begins. We are pleased that the CDC has determined that camp staff qualify as educators/caregivers for vaccination priority. At this point, the National Ramah Medical Committee believes that we cannot make vaccination a requirement due to concerns that it may not be available to all who want it. Vaccination timetables are being updated continuously and the policy may evolve.

What informational parent and camper meetings have been scheduled so far?

A. Save the date for these meetings (all town hall meetings will be recorded if you cannot attend). You will receive more information, zoom links and reminders in separate emails:

[Monday, March 22: Machon Camper Town Hall, 7:00 p.m.](#)

[Monday, March 22: Nivonim Camper Town Hall, 8:00 p.m.](#)

Sunday, April 11: Ramah DC Day Camp Parent Town Hall, 7:00 p.m.

Monday, April 12: Camp Ramah New England (CRNE) Parent Town Hall, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 8: CRNE Orientation Meeting, 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, June 9: CRNE Orientation Meeting, 7:00 p.m.

June date to be announced: Ramah DC Day Camp Orientation Meeting

Camp Ramah New England Update:**Will camp open this summer?**

A: We are very confident that camp will open safely this summer. There are two factors in opening camp: will Massachusetts give us a license to operate and can we run camp safely? The state authorities recently announced that overnight camps will be allowed to open this summer. They have not yet published the COVID regulations. The National Ramah Medical Committee has previously determined that we can operate camp safely.

Due to Kochavim changing to four-week sessions, which edot (units) will be Kochavim and which edot will be Ilanot?

A. Kochavim will consist of campers currently in grades 2 and 3 and Ilanot will consist of campers currently in grade 4. We did this to balance the numbers between these two edot to maximize the camp program experience.

What is the luggage policy going to be this summer?

A. Because parents will not be allowed into camp other than in the immediate drop-off area, we are requiring all camp families to utilize our luggage service to ensure that all luggage is delivered prior to camp. We are working on a plan to unpack the belongings of all A-side campers prior to opening day, to allow a seamless start to camp. There will be an additional cost for this luggage service, which will be billed to every camp family. We are working on a contract with a vendor to provide this service and will update everyone on the logistics and costs as soon as this information is available. We are sorry for the additional costs but feel this is critical to keeping our camp community safe.

How will testing work this summer?

A. We will have a comprehensive and required testing program in place for this summer. We have been hesitant to publish exact details because we do not know whether there will be advances in testing by the summer or precisely what the state will require. Our Ramah New England Medical Committee is working in close partnership with the National Ramah Medical Committee to develop a testing strategy and a partnership with a laboratory.

Here is an early outline of what our testing schedule may look like. All tests, unless otherwise noted, will be nasal swab PCR tests. We also may be able to use saliva PCR tests. It is possible that by summer rapid tests will be deemed sufficiently accurate to be used.

All staff will need a negative PCR result 48-72 hours before arrival and also will be tested upon their arrival for staff week. We are expecting the vast majority of our staff to be vaccinated.

All campers will have to produce a negative test prior to arriving at camp. We are not anticipating asking campers to quarantine prior to coming to camp except that we want camper families to be very careful between the pre-camp test and the start of camp. Additionally, we will follow all state regulations on quarantining and travel but we do not know what those will be or if there will be any restrictions.

We will test the entire camp community on opening day, and days 3, 5 and 8 (the exact number of tests and days may change based on state guidance). We intend to test the camp twice more during the first session.

For the second session, we will repeat the above protocol.

What happens if there is a COVID outbreak at camp and how will we manage close contacts?

A. We are awaiting guidance from the state as to whether anyone who tests positive for COVID will be required to stay at camp or be required to go home.

We have set aside housing and have sufficient staff to care for anyone who tests positive, and we also have set aside housing for anyone who is deemed a close contact and needs to quarantine.

How will camp's food service operate and will there be day workers at camp?

A. Again, our plans may change due to state regulations. We plan on having our dining room staff and much of our kitchen staff reside on site as in years past. It is unclear whether we will be able to utilize foreign staff for this role.

The vast majority of our cooking staff are local day workers. We believe all of them will be vaccinated. They will be allowed to work at camp this summer, will be tested regularly, will always be masked, and will not interact with anyone outside the kitchen. The design of our dining hall keeps the air flow in the dining room separate from the air flow in the kitchen; we

believe that this will greatly reduce the risk that a kitchen worker could spread COVID in the camp.

We have the ability to spread out our camp community during meals so that we can meet all regulations on distancing. We will utilize our dining room, our pavilion and additional picnic tables. We already eat in shifts and will continue to do so even on Shabbat.

Ramah Day Camp Greater DC Update:

Please see our new/updated FAQs below. As always, you can refer to <https://www.ramahdcdaycamp.org/covid-updates-faqs-for-summer-2021/> for a complete FAQ list.

Will the Day Camp require any COVID testing for campers or staff?

A. The Ramah New England Medical Committee is not currently recommending any regular COVID testing. Since we are a day camp, and people come in and out, testing only gives a picture of a particular moment in time; it does not necessarily reduce COVID spread. To our knowledge, no studies have shown that mass screening of asymptomatic people in schools has decreased cases or transmission.

As of now, we anticipate testing will be required only in the following cases: if families or staff travel and the state of Maryland requires it as part of a travel advisory; if there is a positive COVID case in camp and the county recommends testing as a result; and/or in the situation where a camper may be exposed to COVID or in quarantine, they would require a negative test prior to returning to camp, consistent with state guidelines. Please keep in mind that guidelines could change as we move closer to summer.

It is also important to note that since camp is primarily outside, the risk of the spread of COVID is relatively lower than it would be in a school situation. We will be focusing our mitigation efforts on the proven strategies of masking, distancing and outdoor ventilation.

Will there be swimming/swim lessons this summer?

A. We hope to provide as much swimming as possible for our campers this summer (including our usual swim lessons). We are still awaiting county guidelines on this matter. If for some reason we are unable to offer swim, we will find other ways to offer water play. Options may include sprinklers, a misting system, and/or splash pools.

If we are able to offer swim at our Stratford Knolls swimming pool, we will transport campers by bus to this location. It is less than a five-minute drive from camp. For information about our bus transportation COVID policies please refer to our [bus transportation FAQ on our website](#).

Why is there a waitlist for some weeks of camp and what is your process for enrolling

people?

A. We are thrilled that so many families want to register for camp. At the same time, it is painful for us to have to turn anyone away. Currently, there are several weeks when we are at capacity. These numbers are determined by several factors. First, the Wellspring Conference Center limits the number of people that we can have on our property at any one time. Additionally, due to COVID, we have to be extra cautious to ensure that we have adequate space during inclement weather. Finally, we have not yet received COVID guidelines from the county, making it especially difficult to predict group size and configuration.

We are adding people to our waitlist in the order that registrations are received. If additional space is made, we will notify people in application order. There may be other factors, including age group and program type (Sha'ar or non Sha'ar), that may affect who we are able to enroll. We appreciate your patience with us as we try to navigate the demand.

Kol Tuv,

Rabbi Ed Gelb

CEO, Ramah New England