



March 2023

Dear Colleagues of the Illinois Conference and all the Friends of our Camps:

The Outdoor Ministries Committee takes our job very seriously, and it is not always easy or popular. This has been especially true during the trying times of the Global Pandemic and its effect on our camps. As we come out of the critical part of that pandemic, but by no means the end of it, we have taken up a review of our camping policies. One of those policies is the policy surrounding health and safety. I wanted to write and clarify exactly what that policy is and why we feel it is important.

The Vaccination Policy for Illinois Conference Outdoor Ministry, at its passing at our February 2023 meeting is:
For Illinois Conference Outdoor Ministry events (retreats and camps) all participants are encouraged to comply with current CDC and State guidelines concerning vaccinations. If any participant feels they cannot comply with the State and CDC guidelines, they will be admitted to camp, but will be monitored by staff and counselors for changes in their health status.

In addition, as concerning camp staff and volunteers; all staff and volunteers must comply with the CDC and State recommendations and guidelines, AND ALSO have a negative COVID test within a week of their camp starting.

We have discussed this issue at length and ultimately came to an overwhelming majority decision. At present, COVID vaccination is recommended for everyone ages 6 months and older in the United States for the prevention of COVID-19. CDC recommends that people stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccination by completing a primary series and receiving the most recent booster dose recommended for them. This is in addition to all the other currently recommended vaccinations, such as DPT, Polio, etc. You can read all the current guidelines at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/interim-considerations-us.html>.

We do understand that this policy, even as it is looser than during the pandemic, is not always popular with our clientele. However, it is not the role of ODM to be popular but rather to be good stewards and to be diligent about all matters of safety and programming for our outdoor ministries. According to recent figures quoted in the Chicago Tribune, since the pandemic began 18% of all COVID cases were children. This is more than 14 million positive test results in children, with 1,556 children losing their lives. And new cases are recorded every day. We cannot afford to act as though everything has returned to a pre-COVID normalcy. The truth is we will never see that world again, and we must act faithfully in the real world as it exists today. We want our camps to be a safe and nurturing place for all who use them.

We are excited about our camps and the programs & facilities they offer. We hope that you will avail yourself to these treasures within the Illinois Conference, and not let the vaccination policy deter you from enjoying the camps. If you have clarifying questions, and need more explanation, feel free to contact me at Shaman193@gmail.com.

Thank you for your attention. Hope to see you at camp and would love to hear your camping stories.

In Christ,

Dr. Thom Parrott-Sheffer
Chair of Outdoor Ministries Committee