



Date: November 4, 2022

Re: Summer 2023 Covid protocols

Dear Camp Ramah Darom families,

One of the most frequent questions we have received in the last few weeks is, “What are your Covid plans for next summer?” For returning families, we’ve also clearly heard your feedback in the 2022 Camp survey about our approach to Covid management last summer.

As members of the Ramah Darom Medical Committee, we’re writing in the spirit of full transparency to share what we’ve learned from the last two summers, and to provide insight into our initial Committee discussions regarding Covid management at Camp in 2023.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ESTABLISHING RAMAH DAROM COVID PROTOCOLS?

We have an exceptional Ramah Darom Medical Committee that meets regularly to review all aspects of Ramah Darom’s approach to medical care, including our approach to Covid management. Committee members include pediatricians, ER physicians, hospitalists and faculty members at prominent medical institutions. We are all volunteers who bring important perspective as Ramah Darom Board members, camper parents, retreat participants and former Camp staff. All Medical Committee members are also current or past summer camp doctors. You can see the full list of Committee members at the bottom of this email. Ramah Darom CEO Wally Levitt and Camp Director & Head of Education Anna Serviansky are also active participants at every Medical Committee meeting.

HOW DOES THE COMMITTEE MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT COVID PROTOCOLS?

We carefully review all current CDC guidelines as well as any guidance from the National Ramah Medical Committee and other relevant sources. Committee members also bring their own real-world experience as primary care physicians and hospitalists. In some cases, we also seek expert perspective from the outside; for example, last year we consulted with two camper parents who are physicians working at the CDC, as well as an epidemiologist. Committee meetings often include frank discussions and acknowledgement about what’s operationally realistic and manageable in a fast-moving camp setting. The Committee meets every couple of months in the fall and winter, and typically at least once a month leading up to Camp. We are also available to provide real-time guidance during the summer as needed.

WAS RAMAH DAROM THE ONLY CAMP WITH COVID CASES LAST SUMMER?

Unfortunately not. Due to the fast-spreading Omicron variants that emerged in the spring, every Jewish camp across the country had to deal with Covid last summer. We also know that all the other local Jewish overnight camps in the Atlanta area had Covid cases. In fact, there were many other camps – including other camps in the Ramah camping movement – that had to deal with an even larger caseload than Ramah Darom. The topic of Covid management is the single biggest issue on the agenda this fall at camping industry conferences. Said simply: Covid, and in particular Omicron, made it a very tough summer for all camps.

WHAT DID RAMAH DAROM LEARN FROM SUMMER 2022?

We learned many things about managing Covid at Camp. Three of the most important learnings were:

1. **Almost all campers who tested positive for Covid had mild symptoms or were asymptomatic.** In fact, the vast majority of positive cases were found through surveillance testing, not symptomatic testing. We believe a key reason for these mild cases was our requirement that campers and staff be fully up-to-date on Covid vaccination.
2. **Following CDC isolation guidelines in a camp setting is exceptionally challenging.** Housing dozens of Covid-positive campers and providing regular programming for a 10-day isolation period requires substantial overflow housing and additional dedicated staff. This was a particular challenge when we had a surge of cases in our first session, as we were already at camper capacity (all our bunks were being utilized). We also had many cases among our staff and hiring additional summer staff proved to be a real challenge.
3. **Families have widely differing views about the most appropriate approach to Covid at camp.** In our many conversations over the summer, we heard perspectives from across the spectrum - from families who felt all campers should have been fully masked and podded, to families who felt we shouldn't worry about Covid and should stop testing and isolating. There was one common theme, however: no families were happy to get a call to pick up their camper to isolate at home.

HOW WILL RAMAH DAROM DEAL WITH COVID NEXT SUMMER?

The short answer is: we don't yet know for sure. This virus continues to evolve and it's very difficult to predict where things will be in June 2023.

That said, the Medical Committee met in late September and agreed to the following **working assumptions** for summer 2023 based on the current state of the virus and our experience from summer 2022. **These protocols will be continuously reviewed based on the latest developments and may need to be adjusted:**

1. **We will likely require all campers and programming staff to stay "up to date" (as defined by the CDC) on their Covid vaccinations.** While the data on the latest booster is still preliminary (we don't yet know if it substantially decreases transmission) our real-world experience last summer suggests that in a fully vaccinated camp community, most Covid cases will likely be mild. As a reminder, for many years Ramah Darom has had an immunization policy requiring everyone to be fully vaccinated based on CDC recommendations; the Covid vaccination is simply the latest addition to this policy.
2. **We will likely treat Covid the way we treat any other camp virus.** That is, campers or staff who have a fever or are feeling too ill to participate in camp activities will stay in the Marp (Health Center) until their symptoms are resolving, but we will not require mild or asymptomatic cases to isolate. We don't plan to ask families to pick up campers with mild Covid cases; rather, in the same way we manage other illness at camp, only campers who are too ill to be safely treated in our Marp will need to be picked up to recover at home.
3. **We will likely require pre-arrival testing to avoid knowingly bringing Covid into Camp.** Last summer and at recent Ramah Darom retreats, several people tested positive in their pre-arrival screening even though they were asymptomatic. We believe pre-arrival testing, while an extra step for families, is in everyone's best interest. We have not yet decided if the required testing will be PCR or home rapid tests or both.

4. **We will likely not do regular surveillance testing during Camp.** However, we have not yet decided if we will test symptomatic campers or staff for Covid during the summer.

For clarity, the working assumptions above will be continuously reviewed based on the latest developments and may need to be adjusted. If the Committee decides to make substantial changes to our protocols, we will share the updates with families and give you the opportunity to withdraw your campers with a full refund if you are not comfortable with the changes.

For further clarity, the above protocols apply only to summer camp. Ramah Darom retreat protocols can be found [here](#).

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The Medical Committee will continue to meet regularly. We will keep [this page](#) on our website updated as our protocols are reviewed and finalized and will share substantial changes or updates with Camp families via email. We will also use Camp Town Hall meetings to provide updates.

HOW DO I SHARE MY PERSPECTIVE OR ASK QUESTIONS?

Feel free to let the Medical Committee know your thoughts via medical@ramahdarom.org. If you have specific follow-up questions, we suggest emailing our Recruitment & Engagement Associate Julia Weiss at jweiss@ramahdarom.org.

Thank you for entrusting the care of your campers with us. We look forward to seeing them – and keeping them healthy - at Camp Ramah Darom next summer.

THE RAMAH DAROM MEDICAL COMMITTEE

Orly Klein, MD, Committee Chair - Clinical Assistant Professor in Pediatric Stem Cell Transplantation, Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford (Palo Alto, CA)

Taryn Baer-Shalev, MD – Practice Medical Director, Duke Primary Care Pediatrics (Holly Springs, NC)

Lori Colan, MD - Pediatrician (Hollywood, FL)

Leron Finger, MD – Pediatric Critical Care; Associate Chief Medical Officer and Chief Quality Officer, Children's Hospital (New Orleans, LA)

Joshua Wallenstein, MD - Emergency Medicine Physician; Professor of Emergency Medicine, Emory University School of Medicine (Atlanta, GA)