

An open letter to our community regarding KVR Summer Camps:

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve Summer Camp program has been committed to connecting children with outdoor experiences for over 17 years. Safety of our campers and our instructors is paramount. During the COVID-19 crisis, we are informed about best practices for health and safety from medical officials at the CDC, Wisconsin Department of Health, and Vernon Memorial Healthcare/La Farge Medical Clinic.

At this time, we are monitoring the following criteria in planning for when we may run camps:

1. **Cases:** We are looking for a downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period.

As of May 22, 2020, cases are increasing in Vernon County where the KVR is located.

See <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/prepare.htm>

From the Vernon County Health Department: Case counts are only part of the story. There is community spread in our region. Some people may have no symptoms but could still spread COVID-19. It is still important to stay home, wash your hands, wear a face-covering if you must go out, and stop all non-essential travel.

2. **Camp Instructors:** We support the right of our instructors to assess the risk to their own health from possible exposure to asymptomatic carriers. We currently do not have PPE to offer our instructors.
3. **Staff:** We are currently under a state hiring freeze and cannot add the summer intern position that supports all camps with cleaning, materials preparation, supporting instructors for monitoring campers, and snack preparation. We believe that camps offer the safest and best experience for campers when our intern is available.
4. **Building Access:** Indoor shared public spaces are a current concern according to local healthcare providers. Most camps typically use the Visitor Center at some point throughout the day for bathroom access, weather relief, and other activities. Masking protocols, gatekeeping the number of people allowed in the space, and cleaning/disinfecting protocols will need to be in place before camps can run.
5. **Assessing and Monitoring Symptoms:** Currently, the La Farge Medical Clinic is our partner for camp. At this time, we do not have the resources to assess campers and staff for symptoms, and we are committed to not overburden our local healthcare system with additional concerns during this time.
6. **Materials and Supplies:** According to guidelines for schools and youth programs, all materials must be individual and not shared. Currently, our camps use shared art materials, equipment and washable plates and cups. We have limited budget and capacity for individualizing all materials. Additionally, some camp activities require the use of a van or bus to transport campers within the Reserve, the use of this vehicle would not allow proper social distancing protocol.

Q&A

I see other activities and programs for children running, why not the KVR camps?

We respect the right for every organization to make decisions in the best interest of staff and community safety. KVR camps are typically all-day programs that involve snacks and use of indoor bathroom facilities. Instructors work physically closely with campers to help children become observant in the natural world. For example, you might see an instructor calling over a group of children to look closely at a plant, insect, or amphibian. These are the magical moments in outdoor education that are foundational to our camps. Additionally, our camps typically involve collaborative group activities with partners or small groups. These are not advised during social distancing recommendations. At this time, we will not ask our instructors to re-write their camp curriculum, plan, or process due to time and budget demands. We do not have training in place for our instructors to do so. It is safer for our small organization with a limited staff in the education program to suspend camps for the time-being.

I paid for camps. Will I get a refund?

Yes. Our Executive Assistant is working with the state payment system to process these requests. Email communication was sent to every camp family based on the email provided. Please check your spam folders to ensure you did not miss it. Contact our Education Program Coordinator, Jonel Kiesau, with your request.

My child is disappointed. Do you have any resources or ideas for summer adventures?

We understand. We feel sad about not seeing campers and families this year, too. There is nothing like the energy of the first day of camp, complete with jitters for some children as they make a brave step into a new experience and excitement for others as they see old friends and anticipate a week of fun. We know that camp experiences are memorable, important, and valuable. We have created a special camp outreach program for every camper that was registered, and we have been sharing ideas on our KVR Learning Outside blog: <https://kvrlearningoutside.blogspot.com/>. Please visit there to read more about ideas and tips for keeping the spirit of getting out this summer alive and well in your kiddos. We would love for you to share your experiences with photos, comments, or messages, and we have a Facebook page for our KVR community where you can connect, too. We honor the difficulty of this time. We know that having an opportunity to send your child to a quality camp with exceptional instructors in a breathtaking setting is important to you. We are committed to keeping safety our priority so we can all see our way through to better times ahead.

Thank you for your support and understanding.

Sincerely,

The KVR Education Team

Jonel Kiesau and Robin Hosemann