

# Camp Nursing Guidelines

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## Purpose

A camp is a recreational place away from a usual residence which provides different opportunities and experience for children or adults. It may be for a day, overnight, or longer; in an urban or rural setting and accommodation may be in a facility, in tents or in the wilderness. A camp is a community that encourages achievement, builds self-esteem, promotes healthy living, fitness and activity, or it may just be the chance to experience a different environment that is healing in itself. Some have a theme, while others target campers with specific interests, such as music or horseback riding. Others specialize in accommodating children and adults with a particular disability or illness. A registered nurse (RN) practicing within a camp setting needs to be prepared for a challenging, demanding, and multidimensional role.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for **REGISTRANTS**<sup>1</sup> engaged in nursing within the camp setting, either in a paid position, or as a volunteer. Regardless of the practice setting, the practice of all RNs is grounded in the Canadian Nurses Association's (CNA's) *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (2017) and the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta's (CRNA's) *Practice Standards for Registrants* (2023).

The goals of RN practice within a camp setting are to

- prevent accidents, injuries, and illness;
- promote health; and
- treat accidents and illness.

## The Role of the RN in Camp Settings

To practice in the camp setting as an RN, a CRNA practice permit is required. RNs providing care in camp settings are not only clinicians, but also educators and counselors who are prepared to practice safely and autonomously. RNs assume a leadership role in the camp setting. They require management skills and community health preparation in addition to a broad-based general educational background with emphasis on prevention and health promotion.

The camp setting is an environment that can provide unique challenges. Each camp is a small community, and RNs know the nature, characteristics, and health needs of the campers in this environment.

Nurse practitioners (NPs) within the camp setting will likely be practising as an RN. If they are hired as an NP, they must consider if the camp population is the same as the stream of practice they are authorized to practise in. For discussion if volunteer first aid hours can be counted as practice hours, call the CRNA registration department.

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<sup>1</sup> Words or phrases in **BOLD CAPITALS** upon first mention are defined in the glossary.

# Practising in the Camp Setting

## Guideline 1

The RN should determine if a camp environment is one in which they are prepared to practise.

It is important to review the camp's philosophy and objectives when considering a position at a camp. It is essential that the RN ask questions related not only to the type of campers who will be present, but the resources available and the specific camp requirements to address the health-care needs of the campers.

A camp may have detailed or specific qualifications and experience requirements set out in the job description, based on the type of camp and the health needs of the campers. Not all camps are alike, so before accepting a role within a camp setting, either in a paid position or as a volunteer, the RN should meet with the camp leader to discuss the overall expectations and specifics of the camp. There are key questions the RN should ask to help clarify the role and responsibilities and determine if the camp environment is one in which they are prepared to practise.

- Is there a job description available that provides explicit information about the role and responsibilities of the RN?
- Will the RN provide health services to camp staff as well as the campers?
- How and when will the RN communicate with the camp administrator/director?
- What are the services expected from the RN (e.g., checking and ordering of supplies and equipment, set up the health centre, first aid, health assessment, medication storage, medication administration and/or observation of self-administration, record keeping and storage)?
- Will the RN be the only health-care provider on site and be on call 24/7?
- Who will cover for the RN if they have time off?
- Is the RN expected to supervise other camp staff?
- What are the characteristics and health needs of the camp population?
- Are the expectations for this role a good fit with the RN's knowledge and experience?

- Are there former RNs that were employed by the camp who can be contacted to learn about the camp and the nursing responsibilities there?
- Does the RN have responsibilities related to orientation to the camp or health education of camp staff?
- Can the health policies and procedures manual of the camp be reviewed?
- What are the philosophy and objectives of the camp?

## Liability Protection

### Guideline 2

The RN ensures they have appropriate professional liability protection to practise within the camp setting.

RNs should

- ask if the camp insurance covers them;
- ask what is excluded in the camp insurance policy in the event of any lawsuit; and
- consult with their professional liability protection provider to determine the required level of coverage, both in volunteer and paid positions.

## Preparing for Camp

The camp should have procedures to ensure that all campers and camp staff members have provided

- confirmation of a completed health form submitted prior to camp;
- a signed consent for treatment indicating what types of treatment(s) (e.g., medication administration, first aid);
- contact information for parents, family, significant other, or guardian; and
- a current photo of themselves.

## Guideline 3

The RN should determine if a camp environment is one in which they are prepared to practise.

Before the campers arrive, the RN should be aware of the health needs of campers and expected nursing services. Reviewing the health policies and procedures manual of the camp will assist the RN in understanding the breadth and scope of practice required when at a particular camp. If possible, the completed health assessment forms should be reviewed before camp commences and any questions discussed with the parents or guardians. The RN should have current knowledge in first aid and basic life support (BLS) and discuss certification requirements with the appropriate individuals at the camp.

The RN should have the following information available prior to the beginning of camp:

- completed health forms for campers and camp staff
- the health policies and procedures manual of the camp
- policies and procedures related to privacy and management of health information
- a copy of the camp staff manual which outlines how the camp operates, camp staff responsibilities, personnel policies, disaster and/or evacuation protocols
- expectations about how to communicate relevant health information including documentation
- copies of any camp protocols
- established standards such as infection prevention and control policies, water safety, and first aid protocols
- the camp schedule so the RN knows how health activities interface with the routine daily camp activities
- BLS and first aid qualifications of other camp staff
- methods of communication outside the camp (e.g., land line, cell phone, internet)
- physician or NP availability while at camp, and whether they have been involved with this camp previously



- Emergency Medical Service (EMS) availability, where the nearest emergency department is and provisions to transport the camper there
- procedure for initiating calls to parents or guardians and under what circumstances

## On-Site Camp Activities

### Guideline 4

The RN meets each camper and camp staff member at the beginning of the camp term to determine routine health needs and potential health risks.

RNs may arrive at camp before the campers, as there is much preparation required. The RN usually organizes the health centre and ensures all equipment is in working order. The health centre should be set up in a way that will work for the type of campers that will visit the RN. It should be in a quiet area but be easily accessible both for campers and emergency vehicles.

One of the first responsibilities of the RN is to meet each camper and camp staff member at the beginning of the camp term to determine health needs and potential health risks (Casey, 2011). This is an opportunity to determine their baseline health status, review the health assessment form and the medications they have brought with them. Any discrepancy in information of campers' needs should be discussed with the parents or guardians. Communication is equally as crucial for RNs in the camp setting as it is for RNs in any other setting. Notify camp staff and counselors as necessary of conditions that may pose increased risk in certain activities e.g.:

- seizure disorder
- food allergies
- dietary needs
- limitations and restrictions of activity due to disability or exacerbation of symptoms
- special medical devices

## Guideline 5

The RN is responsible and accountable for having the knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and judgment to address the health-care needs of the campers and manage both predictable and unpredictable outcomes of interventions.

The RN promotes the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of campers and camp staff. By familiarizing themselves with issues relevant to the camp setting and the needs of the campers, the RN will be able to provide safe, competent, and ethical care to children and adults in a fun-filled, natural, wholesome environment.

The RN is often the only health-care professional on staff and should be competent to address a wide variety of conditions, from simple first aid to potentially serious medical emergencies. The RN typically has responsibilities for camp staff health as well as for the health needs of the campers (Casey, 2011).

## Infection Prevention and Control

### Guideline 6

The RN follows infection prevention and control standards, policies, and procedures.

The camp setting is usually at a higher risk for the spread of infections due to the prolonged and close contact of campers with each other. It is important to ensure camps are not overcrowded, there is good personal hygiene, clean drinking water, and the camp has appropriate sanitation practices in place. Food handling standards must be upheld. A camp should have policies for prevention of illness and coping with disease outbreaks.

The RN is a role model and an educator of infection prevention and control methods such as hand washing, coughing into the garment at the upper arm, and not sharing cups, straws, etc. Hand washing is the single most important method of preventing the spread of illness. Hand sanitizers are useful supplements to hand washing and should be readily available. Hand sanitizers are not a substitute for regular hand washing. RNs must adhere to the CRNA's *Infection Prevention and Control Standards* (2022b).

The RN should be aware of any provincial infection prevention and control requirements for camps. A camp may also have specific infection prevention and control interventions such as vaccination requirements. The RN and camp staff should be able to recognize early signs and symptoms of disease. If it is suspected that a camper has a communicable disease, the RN must take the necessary measures to assess the situation, implement infection prevention and control measures as appropriate, provide care, and communicate to the appropriate individuals and authorities.

## Camp Protocols

### Guideline 7

The RN assesses and determines if a specific camper with an identified health condition meets the criteria outlined in the protocol.

Protocols can apply to a range of campers who meet certain conditions or criteria. A protocol is a formal document that guides decisions and includes interventions for specific health-care problems. Protocols are a set or series of treatment interventions that can be implemented by the RN for a specific group of clients with identified health conditions when specific circumstances and criteria exist.

### Guideline 8

The RN has the necessary knowledge, skill, and competence to perform the interventions within a protocol.

The camp organization is responsible for ensuring there are appropriate protocols and procedures for common health issues found at the camp e.g.:

- actions to be taken for minor injuries
- acute inflammatory conditions
- major trauma
- emotional and mental health needs

Established protocols need to be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure they continue to be **EVIDENCE-INFORMED** and reflect best practice. When a camp protocol is used, it is documented on the camper's health record.

# Medication Management at Camp

## Guideline 9

The RN practises safe and effective medication management and uses the rights of medication administration.

It is not uncommon for RNs to administer a variety of prescribed medications that campers bring with them. A camper and camp staff may bring prescription and **OVER THE COUNTER (OTC) MEDICATIONS** to camp. RNs who plan to practise at a camp that serves a 'healthy' population may be surprised at the number of campers who have chronic illnesses such as asthma, allergies, diabetes, and emotional, behavioral, or seizure disorders. For campers with special needs, a wide array of skills and knowledge is required, and RNs should be knowledgeable about treatments and medications for that particular group.

Up-to-date information about medications and treatments to be given at the camp setting should be obtained. The RN is responsible for contacting parents or guardians to clarify any medication instructions. It is important for the RN to be familiar with the camp anaphylaxis protocol. The camp should have a policy in place that outlines the level of self-management required of a camper with a chronic illness in order to be able to attend. RNs must adhere to the CRNA's *Medication Management Standards (2022c)*.

Directions and consent for medication administration should be clearly identified on the pre-camp health form. Medications such as antibiotics, asthma medications, antihistamines, anticonvulsants, insulin, or acne medication may be some of the regularly administered medications in a camp setting. Safe and competent medication practice requires using the **RIGHTS OF MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION**.

## Guideline 10

The RN only recommends or administers OTC medication if they have the knowledge, skills, and competence, and when there is supporting practice setting policy in place.

The RN will ensure the following responsibilities are completed:

- Pre-camp health forms are reviewed to determine prescription OTC medications used by the campers and camp staff.

- Medication, including OTC medications, accompanying a camper should remain in its original container, be labeled with the name of the camper, and have clear instructions for administration.
- A system is developed to administer medications safely (e.g., campers give their medications to the RN to store safely and come to the camp health centre for the dose at the prescribed time, or the RN may administer medications at mealtimes depending on the camp or camper).
- A monitoring system is in place when medication is self-administered using, for example, inhalant devices and anaphylactic auto-injectors.
- Camp staff are made aware of which campers carry medications, what the indications for use are, and how they can assist the camper in taking these medications.
- Documentation of all medications given.

For overnight/short trips away from the camp, it is recommended that a partial prescription of medications be sent with campers. If this is desired, parents or guardians may request their pharmacist to re-dispense these medications and provide appropriate labeling.

## Storage of Medications

### Guideline 11

The RN ensures safe and secure storage and disposal of medications.

The RN may be responsible for ensuring safe and secure storage of medications. The following best practices should be maintained:

- a) Store medications securely and in the original container.
- b) Store medications in an appropriate place (e.g., away from light, at room temperature, or in refrigerator, etc.).
- c) Check expiry dates of stored drugs before and throughout camp.

Stock medication should have an inventory list. This list should be managed by the RN and kept up-to-date before, throughout, and at the end of camp. The list should note where the medication is stored (e.g., health centre, first aid kit, etc.). Stock medication that is no longer useable (e.g., out of date, soiled, evaporated, etc.), should be disposed of safely.

## Documentation

### Guideline 12

The RN documents any nursing care, including the use of protocols and the administration of medication, which is provided for a camper or camp staff member.

Documentation is an integral part of providing nursing care regardless of the practice setting, as outlined in the CRNA's Documentation Standards (2022a). RNs are expected to document any nursing care, including the use of protocols and administration of medication, which is provided for a camper or camp staff member.

Health records may vary according to the type of camp and can be written or electronic. The health record should also include a health history form, list of special needs such as allergies, medications, specific nursing care, limitations to various activities, and contact information for parents, family, guardians, significant others, and the primary care provider, etc. All information received and documented should be relevant to the health and care provided for the camper or staff member.

### Guideline 13

The RN ensures the privacy and confidentiality of health and personal information of the camper and camp staff.

RNs have an obligation to protect and maintain the camper's right to privacy and confidentiality of the health information on their health record. Any communication about the health of a camper should be in accordance with legislation such as the *Health Information Act* (2000), the *Health Information Regulation* (Alta Reg 70/2001), the *Personal Information Protection Act* (2003), and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (2000); the CRNA's *Privacy and Management of Health Information Standards* (2022d); and privacy policies.

## Glossary

**EVIDENCE-INFORMED** – The process of combining the best available evidence through a variety of sources such as research, grey literature, experience, context, experts, and client experience and perspectives.

**OVER THE COUNTER (OTC) MEDICATION** – Medication that does not require a prescription which are taken to treat minor health problems at home (Government of Alberta, 2021)

**REGISTRANT(S)** – Includes registered nurses, graduate nurses, certified graduate nurses, nurse practitioners, graduate nurse practitioners, and RN or NP courtesy registrants on the CRNA registry.

**RIGHTS OF MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION** – The core rights of medication administration that reduce medication incidents and, at the very least, include the right: client, medication, dose, route, time, documentation, reason, and response.

## References

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