

URJ Camps Statement on Medication Vacations at Camp

Policy Statement:

The URJ Camping system requires that parents fully disclose on the camper medication form all medication that their child has been taking within the last six months. If it is the intention of parents to keep their child off certain routine medication for the summer – especially during their time at camp – we require that this be disclosed as well.

Background:

“Medication Vacation” is a term given to the practice of suspending ongoing medication treatment. One of the most common examples is the suspension of medication for ADD and ADHD – such as Ritalin or Concerta – which help children and adults focus and concentrate during daytime hours. Other examples can include ongoing allergy or asthma medications.

Relating to camp, we find that some parents of children with ADD/ADHD feel comfortable giving their children a medication break during the summer, as they believe that camp is more of a relaxed environment than school, and that the need for the child to focus is reduced. At camp, children are in fact required to maintain focus at a level often higher than that during the school year. Most activities require campers to be alert, cooperative, and task-oriented for much of the 24 hour day – whether on the ropes course, the bike trail, the tennis court, or during T’fillot. We want to ensure that children can participate fully and in a way that is safe for both them and those around them.

Unfortunately, some parents neglect to inform the camp about chronic medications that they plan to suspend during the summer, either to avoid questioning, or out of concern that their child will be singled out during visits to the Health Center. Parents should be assured that roughly 30% of campers come to the Health Center on a daily basis for medications of all kinds and they are not made to feel different or out of the ordinary for taking meds; it is simply regarded as part of their normal daily routine.

It is not the intent of the URJ Camps’ Medical Staff to usurp the right of parents to decide which medications their child will take during camp. Parents may choose any such course for their child, in full consultation with, and endorsement by, the child’s primary healthcare practitioner. At the same time, the Camp Medical Staff is charged with the responsibility of maintaining a healthy and safe environment for each individual camper and the camp community as a whole. If a child develops significant medical and/or behavioral problems and is found not to be coping or functioning within healthy and safe boundaries, the parent and/or child’s physician will be contacted to discuss the issue. Ultimately, if the welfare of the child becomes compromised, this could result in the child having to be sent home before the session is over.

It is important to note that both oral and inhaled medications can take days, or in some cases weeks, to reach effective levels in the bloodstream or lungs. Therefore, if a child on a drug vacation should suddenly develop symptoms requiring the restarting of the drug, it may take longer for the medication to reach effective levels than there is time remaining in the camping session. For this reason, it is usually in the child’s best interest to attend camp with the medications that have allowed him/her to thrive during the academic year.

We also recognize that not all children on chronic medication will have negative effects from taking a medication vacation while at camp; some may cope very well and thrive in the camping environment. Nonetheless, **the URJ Camping system requires that parents fully disclose on the camper medication form all medication that their child has been taking within the last six months. If it is the intention of parents to keep their child off certain routine medication for the summer – especially during their time at camp – we require that this be disclosed as well.** Armed with this information, our medical staff will be equipped to observe possible overt or subtle indications of the recurrence of chronic medical problems. In addition, staff may discuss concerns with parents before camp begins. The disclosure of this information will ultimately enable the staff to respond in a way that protects both the health and safety of the child and the entire camp community.