



FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY



12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 927 • Fairfax, VA 22035-1118
703-324-8700 • Fax: 703-324-3974 • www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks

Fairfax County Park Authority Summer Camp and Rec-PAC Hot Weather Procedures

With the heat index rising above 100°, parents may have questions over what precautions are being taken to protect their children while they are at camp. Hot, humid weather is a part of the summer routine in the D.C. metro area. The Fairfax County Park Authority provides more than 100 different types of camps and over 1,000 individual weeks of summer camp and Rec-PAC at more than 50 locations. Each summer, children and teens aged 3 to 17 register for thousands of weeks of Park Authority camp programs. With so many facilities and locations, our approach to keeping kids cool differs across the county.

Promoting Healthy Camps

While temperatures often climb to the 90° mark, the county usually has less than 5 days per summer where the Air Quality Index is in the unhealthy range. This summer may be more difficult than others. Some people (especially preschoolers and senior adults) are at higher risk for serious effects of heat and sun and need to take additional precautions. All Fairfax County Park Authority summer camp and class instructors are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat related illnesses and are prepared to take action to prevent them.

1. Training for Staff

The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) provides safety training for its summer camp and Rec-PAC staff:

- All camp staff at Fairfax County summer camps and Rec-PAC locations are CPR and First Aid certified.
- Prior to summer, Fairfax County Health Department Nurses train provide training for staff in recognizing and getting treatment for heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and sunburn.
- Staff are skilled in how to modify outdoor activities in case of very hot weather.

2. Daily Precautions at Summer Camps and Rec-PAC

Park Authority summer camp and Rec-PAC staff are trained to handle even the hottest of Washington D.C. area summer weather. Programs are held in a variety of facilities and locations, each with different options for hot weather. Instead of simply canceling children’s fun when the thermometer soars, the Park Authority takes these steps during hot weather:

- a) **Hot Weather** – Throughout the summer, when temperatures are 80° F or above, children are encouraged to drink plenty of water and take the equivalent of a 15-minute break each

hour (often several shorter breaks) when children cool down and remove face masks.

- b) **Heat Advisory - Heat Index of 100 or Above** - When the heat index (combination of temperature and humidity) is 100 or above (90°F/60% humidity) the National Weather Service will issue a heat advisory. All classes, camps and programs will take precautions to ensure that individuals are not placed at risk for heat related illnesses or conditions.
- a) *Modify activities* – Staff will limit strenuous exercise and sports activities to short periods, followed by a cooling period.
 - b) *More frequent cooling breaks* – Water, shade breaks and mask will happen every 15 minutes during extremely hot weather.
 - c) *Move activities indoors when appropriate* – Especially during the hottest part of the day, camps will go inside or to shaded areas for alternative activities and extended breaks. Many RECenter-based camps feature afternoon pool time during the hottest part of the day.
- c) **Code Red Days** – In addition to heat, the hazy, hot and humid weather creates another hazard as ground-level ozone builds up to unhealthy levels. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments issues a Code Red Alert for Fairfax County on these days, warning that the unhealthy air quality can cause problems for everyone, especially the very young, the elderly, and anyone with respiratory disease. Code Red warnings are usually broadcast a day in advance through radio and television, giving everyone a chance to prepare. You can sign up for email alerts through Clean Air Partners at <https://www.cleanairpartners.net/current-and-forecasted-air-quality>.

Precautions on these days are the same as 100° index days. Sometimes Code Red conditions will be declared for only part of a day (for example from noon until 8 p.m.). On these days, most outdoor activities will occur earlier in the day and physical activity will be limited during the afternoon.

3. Doing Your Part – How You Can Prepare Your Children for Hot Weather

- Listen to the radio/TV/text alerts for weather alerts
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose fitting cotton clothing
- Apply sunscreen (factor at least 15-30) before arriving at camp. Campers should bring their own sunscreen and reapply throughout the day as needed.
- Drink plenty of water. Avoid soft drinks, coffee and other caffeinated beverages.
- Don't overdo it – everything is a little slower paced on a hot day.
- Be sure to inform staff of your medical issues that may be impacted by hot weather.
- Be sure to provide your child with multiple face masks to change throughout the day as needed.

4. Indoor Air Quality

All Park Authority RECenters, nature centers, historic sites and public school buildings have air conditioning, but many camps are outdoor camps, going inside for only brief periods. Occasionally, air conditioning systems at our camp facilities bend under the strain of summer heat. If temperatures soar indoors, here is what the Park Authority will do:

- a) Once indoor temperature climbs above 85°F, staff will stop all physical exertion and implement passive games and activities requiring minimal movement. Children will be given plenty of water to drink.
- b) If air conditioning fails at a facility, maintenance crews move quickly to assess the problem and provide solutions. If repairs can be done quickly, the program will stay at that location and staff will modify activities to restrict exertion. If indoor temperatures continue to climb, campers may be transported by bus or other authorized county vehicle to a nearby alternate location, usually a school. At the end of the day, children will be transported back to their original location for normal pickup times. During 2021, transportation options are limited.

5. Doing Our Part for the Environment

As a result of its efforts, the Fairfax County Park Authority previously received an award from Clean Air Partners, which recognizes regional businesses, organizations, government agencies, and media sources that have made outstanding efforts to decrease ground-level ozone and increase awareness of the hazards of ozone.

Stewardship is an important component of the mission of the Park Authority and this includes being good stewards of the air. The Park Authority has established a variety of programs and initiatives to reduce emissions that pollute the air. Included in these programs are deferring the use of gasoline-powered lawn and garden equipment, deferring the use of VOC (volatile organic compounds) containing paints and pesticides, and deferring the refueling of non-essential gasoline powered vehicles on Ozone Action days (Code Red or higher). To further improve air quality, the Park Authority has committed to purchasing electric and lower emitting gas cans, lawn and garden equipment. The Park Authority also participates in the County's diesel retrofit program and encourages participation in the telework program.

Questions about policies and procedures for Fairfax County Park Authority summer camp programs should be directed to Ellen Werthmann, Youth Services Section Manager, at 703-324-8571 or John Berlin, Program Branch Manager at 703-203-0418.