

KELLY HOLM/LAKELAND TIMES

CELEBRATING VICTORY

Seventeen-year-old Layla Jones of Wausau celebrates her first-place victory in the youth division of the Lakeland Area Mountain Biking Organization's Rip Zip and Sip 7K race on Saturday, Feb. 19 in Minocqua.



Camp Manito-wish introduces COVID vaccine mandate

By Kelly Holm
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

For the summer of 2022, Camp Manito-wish YMCA in Boulder Junction is requiring full vaccination against COVID-19 for all campers and staff. This means that participants will need to complete a primary vaccination series, with or without a booster.

In their "COVID Playbook," which was last updated Feb. 22, Camp Manito-wish credits a variety of guiding sources in helping to arrive at this decision, from state and local health departments to national camp organizations and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Also cited are the camp's legal counsel and a medical advisory committee, neither of which are named. In 2021 said medical advisory committee consisted of three physicians and a nurse practitioner; it is not clear if there are any differences in its makeup for 2022.

The camp, which is an independent YMCA outfit that does not fall under the control of a regional YMCA organization, says that the vaccine mandate will allow, among other things, a return to full camp capacity and group sizes and a reduction in masking and testing.

Possible grounds for exemption from the vaccine mandate include biophysical conditions, such as allergies, and "sincere religious belief," which is not specifically defined. Would-be objectors must "submit and receive approval from Camp administration for a request for exemption a minimum of 2-weeks prior to the start of Camp."

Camp participants must upload proof of their full vaccination status to the CampDocs registration portal no later than two weeks before their session starts. Vaccinated campers and those with exemptions must both provide proof of a negative PCR COVID test result within three days of arrival.

A parent concerned about the vaccine policy, who contacted and spoke with the *Lakeland Times* but whose name will be withheld for her child's privacy, said she recalled that in the summer of 2021, before many campers in Manito-wish's age range had access to COVID vaccines, the camp's policy for unvaccinated participants included a PCR test shortly before coming to camp and a rapid antigen test upon arrival.

This is corroborated by a camp waiver from that time available on the Waiver Electronic app, which

states "Camp Manito-wish will provide COVID-19 Antigen and PCR Molecular tests onsite upon arrival at camp and during camp as needed," but much of the information regarding last summer's policies is no longer available on Manito-wish's website.

Camp Manito-wish cited the American Camp Association (ACA) as one factor which influenced their decision to issue a vaccine mandate. The ACA's COVID-19 field guide, which was last officially updated in June 2021, endorses the COVID-19 vaccine and encourages camps to recommend it, as well as compliance with the recommended childhood vaccination schedule.

At the time of last update, the ACA said that "it is not recommended to exclude campers or staff who have not received the (COVID-19) vaccination" as it was not yet authorized or accessible to many camp participants. The field guide is expected to be updated within the coming months for summer 2022.

Another organization Manito-wish cited in their decision process was the Association of Camp Nursing (ACN). Its director, Dr. Tracey Gaslin, said that camps should encourage full vaccination for campers

and staff, as well as the use of non-pharmacological interventions like face coverings, but stopped short of endorsing mandates.

"We don't have a stance on mandating, but we do feel that camps should strongly encourage, if nothing else, to have campers and staff fully vaccinated," Gaslin said. "When you say everybody should do this, everybody shouldn't do something — you can't clump people all into one thing. They've got to make the best decision for their camp at that particular time for their population."

Gaslin said that many camps were still in the process of making a decision on COVID-19 vaccine policy, and that some will not issue decisions until closer to May. However, she said that about a quarter of camps mandated COVID-19 vaccines for staff last year, and that she expects the number to rise for the coming summer.

Camp Manito-wish, while initially expressing willingness to schedule an interview with the *Lakeland Times* for this story, ultimately declined to comment beyond what is posted on their website.

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