The Asthma & Allergy Center

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Camping with Allergies

Camp safe this summer with allergies, asthma

Summer camps is a time for children to make new friends and enjoy the outdoors. While parents may be packing plenty of sunscreen and bug spray for their children's camping adventure, it's also important to prepare for the unexpected, such as an allergy or asthma attack.

Before your child heads off to camp, they should visit an allergist/immunologist for a complete exam. An allergist/immunologist will prescribe the medications they may need to avoid asthma attacks and allergic reactions caused by outdoor allergens.

Take the following precautions to ensure that allergies and asthma don't spoil your child's summer camp experience:

- Smoke is a harmful irritant to people with asthma. It makes it hard to breathe and can trigger an asthma attack. A person with asthma should fit further away from the campfire and move away if the wind blows the smoke in their direction.
- Dry areas can create dust that makes it hard to breathe. Therefore, it's better to set up a tent on a grassy area (unless you have a severe grass allergy).
- Remember to pack all medications in a first aid kit before your child leaves for camp, such as an Epi-Pen for a food reaction, an inhaler for asthma, antihistamines for allergies and cortisone for skin reactions.
- If you aren't supplying all of the foods for your child's trip, be sure they bring along some healthy non-allergenic snacks and a list of foods they are allergic to. Have them given this list to their camp in advance so they can buy safe, non-allergenic foods for your child to eat.
- Ragweed, a common allergy trigger, typically grows in open areas where wind can spread its pollen. Open meadows could mean trouble if ragweed is present. Ragweed growing season begins in July or August in most parts of the country and lasts until the first frost. Trees also can be allergy triggers when they spread their pollen. Tree pollen season typically ends in June.
- Strings from insects such as wasps and hornets can cause a life threatening condition called anaphylaxis. If your child had a previous reaction to a sting, you should make sure they always carry an Epi-Pen. An adult (such as camp personnel) should be trained to give them an injection, if they need it.
- Be sure to air out the tent in advance of the camping trip. Clean up any mold with a diluted bleach and water mixture. Mold spores can trigger allergy and asthma attacks.
- Be on the lookout for plants like poison ivy and poison oak, which can cause a serious itchy rash when touched or brushed against. Pack ointments, lotions and antihistamines to treat potential

allergic skin reactions. Wear long pants when hiking through weedy and bushy areas where these plants may be hiding.