

Fern & Feather Nature Camp Information Packet

felixneck@massaudubon.org, 100 Felix Neck Dr. Edgartown, MA 02539, (508) 627-4850

Thank you for selecting Fern & Feather Nature Camp for your camper. This handbook gives you an overview of our camp policies and contains important information to help ensure your camper is ready for the first day of camp. Please take some time to read it over and discuss it with your camper.



If you have any questions, please contact the Camp Director, Sydney Pigott at (508) 627-4850 or email felixneckcamp@massaudubon.org

We look forward to a successful camp season!

Felix Neck & You: A Camp Partnership

Fern & Feather Nature Camp strives to offer high quality, fun, and educational experiences to all of our campers – experiences we hope they enjoy and remember for a long time. However, we cannot meet this goal without help from all of our campers and their families, so we invite you to enter a partnership to ensure that every camper has the best possible learning adventure while attending our camp program.

We pledge to provide:

- Nature based programs that incorporate learning, social interaction, and free play.
- An environment where staff establish expectations and model appropriate behavior.
- Positive community spirit that helps every camper feel included and cared about.

In return, we expect the following from our guardians and campers:

- Attention to the daily preparation needs of your camper (dressed appropriately, has a water bottle and nutritious snack/lunch).
- Cooperation with our stated and written policies; and willingness to act in concert with camp staff to maintain or restore appropriate behavior and courtesy.
- And commitment to the well-being of the entire camp community (such as keeping a sick or overtired camper at home).

If, at any time, you have a question or concern about our day camp program, please contact our Camp Director. No question or concern is too small for you to bring to our attention. You may request copies of our background checks, health care, discipline, and/or grievance policies at any time.

Our Staff:

Camp staff members are carefully selected for their maturity and their caring attitude towards campers. All staff must pass background checks and receive training in safety, camper development, and natural history. Instructors are certified in First Aid and CPR. Lead instructors are also lifeguard certified. In addition, we have a Healthcare Consultant on call to provide routine care if needed. Campers are never alone with staff; we maintain a “rule of three” at all times during camp; meaning that the minimum number of people must be three when doing or going anywhere on camp.

Our Credentials, License, and Accreditation:

Fern & Feather Nature Camp is licensed by the Edgartown Board of Health and complies with the regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We are also accredited by the American Camp Association.

Camp Essentials Checklist

- Check that the sessions and dates listed in the confirmation email are correct.
- Review this entire information packet.
- Camp sessions **paid-in-full** by **May 15th 2024** - we offer payment plans!
- Complete CampDoc profile** by **May 15th 2024**.
- Receive “Registration Complete” email** from Program Registrar confirming you are ready for camp!
- GET EXCITED!!- Camp season is coming, and we are so excited to see you!

Important Reminders

Medical Information:

Under Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health requirements, all campers must have a health form on file before attending camp. A physical exam is requested within the 18 months prior to camp and is required for programs with 3 or more overnights. Health forms will be sent to you upon registration via ‘CampDoc’ – an online electronic health records company. Please **upload immunization records and health forms to CampDoc by May 15th 2024**.

Payment Plan & Sliding Scale Information:

All camp sessions must be **paid-in-full** no later than **May 15th 2024**.

Payment Plans:

Mass Audubon offers installment/monthly-based payment plans to facilitate easy and organized payments for camp. Please contact our Program Registrar to create a payment structure.

Sliding Scale:

Camp families may register using a tuition rate based on their annual gross income and household size. Registrants who use a tier 1-4 tuition rate will need to upload **income verification (tax return/ pay stub) to their CampDoc profile**. Camp administrative staff with Personal Information Protection (PIP) training will privately review any provided income verification documents and confirm or adjust the tiered rate based on your reported adjusted gross income. For more information, please visit our [Sliding Scale Pricing Structure](#).

Refunds and Cancellations:

A full refund, minus the nonrefundable deposit, is provided to camp families who cancel in writing on or before **Wednesday, May 15th, 2024**. Deposits are not transferable, and refunds are not given for participant dismissal, absence, or incomplete attendance, including sick days. **After May 15th there are no refunds.** If we must cancel a session, you will receive a full refund.

Session Transfer:

Session transfer requests will be honored if there is space available and if a request is made at least two weeks prior to the session start date, after which transfers are not permitted.

Dismissals:

The camp reserves the right to dismiss a camper when the camper's behavior interferes with the rights of others, the smooth functioning of the group or activity, or violates the camp's principles of conduct. In such cases, no refund will be given.

Deadlines:

All camp sessions must be **paid-in-full**, and all **paperwork must be completed and uploaded to CampDoc no later than May 15th, 2024**. Registrants will receive a completion email from our Program Registrar. A camper cannot attend camp and their spot is not guaranteed until all forms, waivers, and payments are completed (or a payment plan has been established). After **May 15th, 2024** registrants with outstanding balances and/or incomplete paperwork are at risk of losing their space(s) to someone from our waitlist.

If you need assistance at any time, please contact felixneckcamp@massaudubon.org or (508) 627-4850.

Camper Drop-Off and Pick-Up

Fern & Feather Nature Camp Address: 100 Felix Neck Dr. Edgartown, MA 02539

A Note on Parking:

The entrance to Felix Neck is a very narrow road with limited turnouts. As a courtesy to fellow camp families, please be mindful of designated turnout spots. Please take the initiative to move into the nearest designated turnout if encountering another vehicle.

Camp Hours:

Camp begins at 9 am and ends at 2:30 pm. Monday through Friday (unless otherwise scheduled for specific camp sessions). An authorized adult (with ID) must sign campers in and out of camp every day. Registrants should use **CampDoc** to list adults authorized for drop-off/pick-up.

Camper Drop-Off:

Please apply sunscreen (SPF 30 minimum) and bug repellent each morning at home before arriving at camp. No aerosols are allowed at camp.

- o This year drop-off will be rolling from **8:45-9:15 am**. Please park in designated Fern & Feather Nature Camp Spots while dropping off your camper.
 - o *Early Arrival: Staff cannot be responsible for campers before 8:45 am.*
- o Check-in on the first day will take longer as we greet families, and make sure we have everything needed for the week. We appreciate your patience.
- o When entering the Sanctuary, camp families should drive slowly and stay alert for pedestrians, wildlife, and other vehicles. **Use turnouts when other vehicles approach.**
- o A **parent/guardian must be present on the first day** of camp to verify health and authorized pick-up information. Under NO circumstances may you drop off your camper without **signing them in with a staff member.**
- o **Authorized Pick-Up:** We will verify adults authorized for camper pick-up during the first day check-in. Adults must have identification at time of pick-up.

- After you check-in with the Camp Director, your camper will be escorted to their designated group area.
- **Late Arrivals:** Please email and call the office at (508) 627-4850 if your camper will be arriving late. When you arrive, please park in the parking lot and call the office; a staff member will come and retrieve your camper.

Camper Pick-Up:

Adults picking up campers **MUST BE AUTHORIZED** via camper's **CampDoc** Release form and have identification at time of pick-up.

Please be prompt in picking up your camper. Please call the office if you will be late for Pick-Up.

- This year Pick-Up will be rolling from **2:15-2:30 pm**.
- Please be prepared to **show proper identification to camp staff**. Staff will remain with campers until an authorized adult has picked up each camper.
- Adults **MUST BE AUTHORIZED** on the release form completed on **CampDoc**. We will not release campers to anyone who is not listed on the release form or has not been authorized by you. There are no exceptions.
- **Early Pick Up:** Please notify the Camp Director as soon as possible if your camper will need to be picked up from camp early. This will allow our counselors to make sure that your camper is ready to go on time.
Please Note: Your camper's group may be up to 30 minutes away from the Nature Center.
- **Emergency Pick Up:** If you need to unexpectedly pick up your camper, please **call our office as soon as possible, at (508) 627-4850** and ask for our Camp Director, Sydney Pigott. Only authorized adults with identification will be able to pick up campers.
- Limited spaces for aftercare will be available from 2:30-3:30 pm. **Registration is required.**

★ **Late Night:** *for Adventurer and Ecologist groups only!*

Fern & Feather hosts an optional Late Night for campers in the Adventurer and Ecologist groups from 6:00-9:00 pm on Thursday evenings (except July 4th).

Campers participate in a full day of camp on Thursday, with the option of returning at 6:00 pm for an optional Late Night! Campers should have eaten dinner at home; only a snack/s'mores will be provided in the evening. Please communicate with the Camp Director prior about dietary restrictions. *Campers should be picked up promptly at 9:00 pm on Thursday.*

There is **no camp on Friday** for Adventurer and Ecologist groups.

Absence From Camp:

For scheduled absences, please email felixneckcamp@massaudubon.org; absences during camp sessions must be confirmed in writing. No refunds or transfer of funds will be given for dismissal or incomplete attendance (including sick days). See *Health & Safety* section for more information on our sick camper policy.

Dogs & Pets: We love animals; however, **domestic animals are not allowed at Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary**. Please leave your pets at home or in the car during drop-off and pick-up times and please **do not** walk your pets in the parking areas.



First Day of Camp & What to Expect

Before your camper comes to camp:

Please take some time to prepare your camper for their participation in our camp program.

- Each group will have a designated area to meet and space to place their belongings. On the first morning of each session, counselors will provide an orientation to the camp area, boundaries, location of bathrooms, etc.
- Each camper will be expected to be courteous and respectful to others, and to follow instructions. We will address this with each camp group on the first day of each session.
- **TICK CHECKS:** During the camp day, we do **regular tick checks** at lunch and other times as needed. Every night at bath time or just before bed, please take a few minutes to **check your camper for ticks**.
- Encourage your camper to go to bed early the night before, and during their camp week – a good night's rest is essential to having a good day at camp!

Please apply each morning at home before arriving at camp:

- **Sunscreen:** For camper safety, please show your camper how to apply their own sunscreen. We will reapply at lunch each day and may help campers with your permission.
- **Bug Repellent:** Bug repellent is recommended, mosquitoes and ticks share the habitat at Felix Neck. We will reapply at lunch each day and may help campers with your permission.
- **Please Note:** Aerosol sprays are not permitted at camp.

Grown-up & Camper Mornings:

On **Thursdays at 8:30 am** (Except July 4th) grown-ups are invited to join their campers for a pre-camp walk or activity with Felix Neck staff and Suzan Bellincampi, Sanctuary Director. See the trails where your camper spends their days exploring. Activities vary each week and are dependent on weather conditions. Grown-ups are also invited to join our **Morning Circle on Fridays, 9:00-9:30 am** during which each group shares something they have done or created during the week.

What to Wear & What to Pack

What to Wear:

- **Clothing:** We recommend that campers **wear comfortable, light-weight clothing. Long sleeve shirts and long pants** can be helpful to avoid mosquito bites and ticks.
- **Footwear:** We recommend **comfortable walking shoes** that can get wet and muddy (Texas, Keens, etc.) as it is difficult to walk through the marsh, along trails and in the pond without losing them! **Due to the nature of our camp, flip-flops and crocs are not allowed to be worn.**

Please LABEL, LABEL, LABEL all of your camper's belongings.

Mass Audubon is not responsible for lost or damaged articles that have been brought to camp.

What to Pack:

A backpack containing the following:

- **Snack and Lunch:** Please see the *Food & Snack* section.
- **Water Bottle:** A reusable water bottle; *please do not freeze the water bottle*, the ice will not melt fast enough to give your camper enough water to drink! We refill water bottles whenever needed.
- **Sunscreen - SPF 30+:** With your permission, we can help reapply. **Aerosol sprays are not permitted.**
- **Insect Repellent:** We share our habitat with mosquitoes and ticks. We recommend lotions, wipes, and pumps. With your permission, we can help reapply. **Aerosol sprays are not permitted.**
- **EXTRA set of clothes:** Adventure can get messy; a second set helps campers return clean and dry!
- **EXTRA pair of shoes and socks:** Comfortable walking shoes that can get wet and muddy.
- **Hat and/or Sunglasses.**
- **Water Shoes:** or a pair that can get wet and muddy, again no flip-flops.
- Rain jacket and rain pants (optional).

- Sweater or sweatshirt for cool days (optional).
- ★ **For Adventurers and Ecologists:** Bring a bathing suit and towel for snorkeling/kayaking.

What Not to Pack:

Mass Audubon is not responsible for lost or damaged articles that have been brought to camp.

Your camper should not pack:

- Electronic devices, cell phones, portable gaming consoles, walkie-talkies, etc.
- Collectable cards, stuffed animals, and other personal toys.
- Personal sports equipment.
- Matches, firearms/ammunition, knives or weapons of any kind (including toy weapons) – **Grounds for immediate dismissal.**
- Tobacco products, alcohol, illegal drugs. Possession and use are prohibited.
- Pets or any animals.

Any such items will be taken and held by the counselors in a secure spot to be returned to guardians at the end of the day. If there is an appropriate item that your camper would like to bring in, please contact our Camp Director in advance.

Food & Snack

Please pack a nutritious and filling, non-refrigerated (an ice pack is recommended to keep food cool) snack and lunch that will produce as little trash as possible. Due to potential problems with food allergies, campers are not permitted to share food.

While we are not a nut-free facility, we **ask camp families to pack snacks and lunches that are nut-free.** If you have questions about nut-free products, please contact the Camp Director and be sure to read the ingredients on the packaging.

Carry-In/Carry-Out: We have a carry-in/carry-out policy for all non-compostable trash/waste; all lunch wrappers/containers will be packed home with campers.

Think about your impact – try to pack so as to produce as little trash as possible.

Health & Safety

Health Care at Camp:

The Camp Director, camp counselors, and other full-time Felix Neck staff have certifications in First Aid and CPR. Our off-site healthcare consultant is Dr. Julia Stunkle, Primary Care Doctor at Martha's Vineyard Hospital. The Camp Director acts as the onsite Health Supervisor and will administer any prescribed medications during camp. The Edgartown Fire Department EMTs provide emergency care for Felix Neck camp programs.

Due to the outdoor and exploratory nature of our camp program, campers will be moving on uneven terrain throughout the camp day. The terrain at our site varies from hard-packed, gently sloped paths, to steeper uneven trails that may have exposed rocks, tree roots, and other obstacles. We encourage all families to visit the camp's Sanctuary prior to enrolling to understand its unique terrain.

If you have questions regarding your camper's ability to participate due to a health or behavioral issue, please contact the Camp Director, Sydney Pigott, at spigott@massaudubon.org or (508) 627-4850.

Camper Health Information:

Under Massachusetts state law, all campers must have a health form on file, which includes a health history, before attending camp. **Fern & Feather Nature Camp uses CampDoc.com, an electronic health record system.** After registering, an email will be sent from **CampDoc.com** on how to complete your

camper's health information online. A parent/guardian must complete their camper's CampDoc profile. Please contact our Program Registrar to add parents/guardians to a CampDoc profile for access.

Immunization Record/Physical Exam:

Immunizations and Physicals must meet the requirements of the MA Dept. of Public Health. We require a copy of your camper's immunization record (dates must be provided by the healthcare provider). A physical exam is requested within the 18 months prior to camp.

Please contact us if:

- You need a health care treatment/immunization form for your physician to complete.
- Families whose religious beliefs advise against physical exams and/or immunizations need to contact Fern & Feather regarding our emergency treatment policy and waiver.

Remember:

- Doctors' offices are very busy, and it may take a while to get the information you need from them.
- **School/Sport forms** often contain immunization records and health care information.
- Please plan ahead as your camper cannot attend camp without a current copy of their immunization record.
- ★ For Adventurers and Ecologists, upload a copy of their insurance card to their **CampDoc** profile.

Medications at Camp:

If your camper takes medication during the camp day or has emergency medications (inhalers, EpiPens, etc.), you will be required to upload an allergy/medication action plan to **CampDoc.com**. No medication may be administered without this form. All medications must be checked in with the Camp Director on the first day of camp. A record of medication administered is kept in the first aid logbook.

At-Camp Medications:

If your camper requires medication while at camp, the following are requirements:

- All medications must be in their original containers with the pharmacy label and camper name and have specific instructions for use.
- Medications must be current (not expired).
- All medications must be approved by the camp's Healthcare Consultant and be seen and checked by the camp Healthcare Supervisor.

Asthma and/or Severe Allergies:

All campers who have severe allergies or severe asthma must provide an Emergency Action Plan.

- This plan should be written by the prescribing physician and describe the triggers and signs of a severe reaction, and necessary steps to take if a reaction should occur (e.g. give 2 tsp. Benadryl then administers EpiPen, etc.).
- The camp Healthcare Supervisor will contact a parent/guardian to review this plan before camp begins.
- We will not be able to administer nebulizer treatments at camp.

EpiPens & Inhalers:

Camp staff members will carry a camper's EpiPen and/or inhaler throughout the camp day and return them to the Healthcare Supervisor at the end of the day.

- All staff are trained in the administration of EpiPens and inhalers. All staff are trained in the symptoms of anaphylaxis and allergic response. Campers may also self-administer EpiPens with written permission from the parent/guardian.
- Inhalers can be administered by the Healthcare Supervisor, or by the camper themselves with written permission from the parent/guardian. Please indicate your preference on **CampDoc**.

Health Insurance:

A parent/guardian must complete the health/medical/accident section of **CampDoc**. If your camper does not have U.S (United States) health and accident insurance, **please contact our Camp Director**.

Absent/Sick Campers:

If a camper is going to be absent, please call the office at (508) 627-4850 to inform staff. If there are scheduled absences during the camp session, please inform camp staff in writing. Please do not send a sick camper to camp. Campers should stay home when they show any of the following symptoms:

- Active lice or scabies infestation
- Continuous cough
- Diarrhea
- Discharge from or red eyes
- Earache
- Fever
- Skin Eruptions
- Sore throat
- Vomiting

Campers with viral infections will be allowed to return when their fever returns to normal without the aid of fever-reducing medications. Campers with bacterial infections will be allowed to return after 24 hours on antibiotics. Campers infected with lice may return when they have been treated and are nit free.

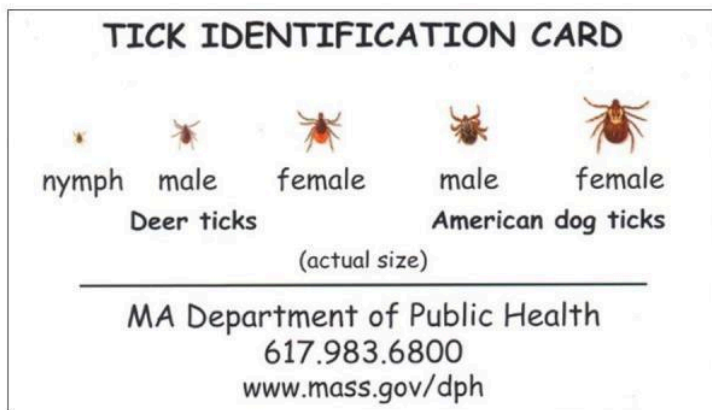
No refunds or transfer of funds will be given for incomplete attendance, including sick days.

In case of any illness where a camper is absent from camp, guardians must speak to the Camp Director before the camper may return to camp.

If your camper is sick at camp:

- All campers requiring medical assessment and/or treatment beyond basic first aid are referred to the Healthcare Supervisor. Based upon assessment, the camper will be cared for on-site and returned to their camp group, sent home to guardians for personal health care provider care, or referred to emergency care providers.
- If your camper's illness extends beyond 20-30 minutes, we will notify you by phone. Sick campers stay with the Healthcare Supervisor in a quiet area so they can rest and be monitored.
- If a camper's injury requires emergency care, emergency services (911) will be called, and guardians will be contacted immediately.
- Guardians will be notified of any serious accident or illness as soon as possible; daily notification by paper slips or phone call is provided to guardians for all reported injuries and illnesses.

Tick Precautions:



We live in New England and ticks can be found everywhere, including your own backyard. During the camp day, we do **regular tick checks** at lunch and other times as needed. Every night at bath time or just before bed, please take a few minutes to **check your camper for ticks**. Be sure to check behind the knees, underwear lines, underarms, and at the hairline on the back of the neck. If you would like more information about ticks and Lyme disease, please visit the MA Department of Health website at: www.mass.gov/dph/tick.

Behavior Expectations & Discipline Policy

Due to the outdoor and exploratory nature of our camp program, campers must be able to move about on uneven terrain. Campers are expected to participate meaningfully in age-appropriate activities, including nature study. Campers must follow stated behavior expectations and safety rules.

Our behavior expectations and safety rules have been developed to ensure the safety of campers and to show respect for self, others, and the environment. Campers will be made aware of these rules on the first day of the session. Our counselors are trained to create a safe environment for all campers by establishing these expectations, fostering positive camper relationships, and offering guidance throughout each camp day. **Campers are expected to follow Mass Audubon's Camper Code of Conduct with minimal one-on-one support.**

You can help us best ensure your camper has a successful experience by proactively sharing information in his/her/their **Health History** section on **CampDoc**. Camp families planning to provide a 1:1 aide* must contact the Camp Director ahead of time. Camp families are responsible for providing an aide for campers who require 1:1 attention or need repeated behavioral redirection/social-emotional support.

*For any aides/adults joining a camper, Mass Audubon performs a background check and requires a completed adult health form, waiver, and record of immunization.

If you have any questions regarding your camper's ability to participate fully in our camp program, please contact the Camp Director. The Camp Director reserves the right to dismiss a camper when, in their judgment, the camper's behavior interferes with the rights of others, the smooth functioning of the group or activity, or violates the camp's behavior policy. In such cases no refunds will be given.

Please review these behavior expectations with your camper before arrival to camp:

- Follow the Camp Director and counselor's directions.
- Stay with your group, beside or behind the leader.
- Use kind words; treat everything and everyone around you with respect.
- Keep your hands to yourself and be mindful of others personal space.
- Leave sticks and other objects where you found them (unless otherwise told it is okay).
- Hitting, punching, fighting (either verbally or physically) and foul language are **grounds for dismissal**.

Discipline Policy:

To ensure the safety of all campers and respect for people and the environment, campers are made aware of camp rules on the first day of each session. Staff will follow a series of steps following camper infringements of behavior expectations and/or safety rules: one-on-one discussion, break from activities, and time with the Camp Director. If necessary, the Camp Director will ask the parents/guardians to join the conversation about the behavioral expectations at camp. If such expectations are not met, the Camp Director may dismiss the camper. No refunds or transfer of funds will be given for dismissal or incomplete attendance (including sick days).

As mandated by the state, corporal punishment will not be used; no camper will be subjected to cruel or severe punishment, humiliation or verbal abuse; no camper will be denied food as punishment; and no camper will be punished for soiling, wetting or not using the toilet. A complete copy of the Discipline Policy is available upon request.

Risk Management:

Mass Audubon staff members make every effort to conduct safe programs, to orient and support campers, and to inform camp families of inherent risks. Some activities may involve risks that participants do not routinely encounter at home. Risk management is an essential element of all the activities that we offer. Our standard precautions include conducting our program in a manner consistent with the practices and procedures recommended by the Mass Department of Public Health and the American Camp Association. While we anticipate that these efforts will ensure the well-being of each participant, we are also aware that it is neither possible to foresee every contingency nor to eliminate all risk.



Visitor Interactions:

During the summer months, Felix Neck's Nature Center and office are open to the public from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Staff are on duty in the Nature Center whenever camp is in session. The trails are open dawn to dusk every day. Trail patrols are done weekly by property staff to assess the condition of trails for visitor use. Before the camp season, the Camp Director and Property Manager meet to discuss security concerns and develop a plan of action as necessary.

For staff and camper safety, all counselors are required to carry a two-way radio. Campers shall be instructed in safety procedures for interactions with the general public during their camp orientation. Campers shall not approach strangers on or off camp property and shall refer all questions/concerns about strangers to a supervising staff member. Visitors will not be allowed to disrupt the camp activities and will be asked to leave camp areas (Camp Barn). Staff are instructed to ask unrecognized persons to leave the program area, kindly explaining that the area is not open to the public. If the person poses a safety threat, staff shall make sure that the campers are safe. Staff will bring the campers to a place of safety and contact the Camp Director. Staff will seek help from other camp and Felix Neck staff if the incident constitutes a threat to campers or themselves. The Sanctuary Director will contact the appropriate authorities if necessary.

Additional Information

Campers are not considered to have increased risk of Meningococcal disease, but the Massachusetts Department of Public Health would like us to provide the information on the last page.

Go Green!

Please support us this summer by adopting some "green" practices at home or while on vacation. Pack lunches with reusable containers, avoid juice boxes (they stay sticky and attract ants) if possible, and pick up a reusable water bottle. Visit www.wastefreelunches.org for more ideas on how to pack waste-free lunches and snacks. Families walk, bike, and even paddle to camp each summer! Consider the environment when planning your transportation and try to carpool when possible.

Felix the Owl:

Each day, a lucky camper is selected to take Felix (a stuffed animal owl) home for an evening to play with and write/draw in our Felix Neck journal all about Felix's adventures with your family.

July 4th:

There will be no camp on July 4, and 5, 2024.
Camp sessions are prorated to reflect a 3-day camp week.

Visit Us:

Felix Neck is open to the public daily from dawn to dusk - drop your campers off, and take a guided kayak tour, join us aboard The Skipper on a Marine Discovery Tour, or bring the whole family for a walk on our trails. Members receive discounts on all programs and in the Gift Shop. Browse our summer offerings by following this link: [Felix Neck Programs and Activities](#)

Questions:

Call the office (508) 627-4850 or email felixneckcamp@massaudubon.org for additional details and FAQs.

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Meningococcal Disease and Camp Attendees: Commonly Asked Questions

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is caused by infection with bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. These bacteria can infect the tissue (the “meninges”) that surrounds the brain and spinal cord and cause meningitis, or they may infect the blood or other organs of the body. Symptoms of meningococcal disease may appear suddenly. Fever, severe and constant headache, stiff neck or neck pain, nausea and vomiting, and rash can all be signs of meningococcal disease. Changes in behavior such as confusion, sleepiness, and trouble waking up can also be important symptoms. In the US, about 350-550 people get meningococcal disease each year and 10-15% die despite receiving antibiotic treatment. Of those who survive, about 10-20% may lose limbs, become hard of hearing or deaf, have problems with their nervous system, including long term neurologic problems, or have seizures or strokes. Less common presentations include pneumonia and arthritis.

How is meningococcal disease spread?

These bacteria are passed from person-to-person through saliva (spit). You must be in close contact with an infected person’s saliva in order for the bacteria to spread. Close contact includes activities such as kissing, sharing water bottles, sharing eating/drinking utensils or sharing cigarettes with someone who is infected; or being within 3-6 feet of someone who is infected and is coughing and sneezing.

Who is most at risk for getting meningococcal disease?

People who travel to certain parts of the world where the disease is very common, microbiologists, people with HIV infection and those exposed to meningococcal disease during an outbreak are at risk for meningococcal disease. Children and adults with damaged or removed spleens or persistent complement component deficiency (an inherited immune disorder) are at risk. Adolescents, and people who live in certain settings such as college freshmen living in dormitories and military recruits are at greater risk of disease from some of the serotypes.

Are camp attendees at increased risk for meningococcal disease?

Children attending day or residential camps are **not** considered to be at an increased risk for meningococcal disease because of their participation.

Is there a vaccine against meningococcal disease?

Yes, there are 2 different meningococcal vaccines. Quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine (Menactra, Menveo and MenQuadfi) protects against 4 serotypes (A, C, W and Y) of meningococcal disease. Meningococcal serogroup B vaccine (Bexsero and Trumenba) protects against serogroup B meningococcal disease, for age 10 and older.

Should my child or adolescent receive meningococcal vaccine?

That depends. Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MenACWY) is routinely recommended at age 11-12 years with a booster at age 16 and is required for school entry for grades 7 and 11. In addition, these vaccines may be recommended for additional children with certain high-risk health conditions, such as those described above.

Meningococcal serogroup B vaccine (Bexsero and Trumenba) is recommended for people with certain relatively rare high-risk health conditions (examples: persons with a damaged spleen or whose spleen has been removed, those with persistent complement component deficiency (an inherited disorder), and people who may have been exposed during an outbreak). Adolescents and young adults (16 through 23 years of age) who do not have high risk conditions may be vaccinated with a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine, preferably at 16 through 18 years of age, to provide short term protection for most strains of serogroup B meningococcal disease. Parents of adolescents and children who are at higher risk of infection, because of certain medical conditions or other circumstances, should discuss vaccination with their child’s healthcare provider.

How can I protect my child or adolescent from getting meningococcal disease?

The best protection against meningococcal disease and many other infectious diseases is thorough and frequent handwashing, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. Individuals should:

1. wash their hands often, especially after using the toilet and before eating or preparing food (hands should be washed with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel or rub may be used if hands are not visibly dirty);
2. cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and discard the tissue in a trash can; or if they don’t have a tissue, cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve.
3. not share food, drinks or eating utensils with other people, especially if they are ill.
4. contact their healthcare provider immediately if they have symptoms of meningococcal disease.

If your child is exposed to someone with meningococcal disease, antibiotics may be recommended to keep your child from getting sick.

You can obtain more information about meningococcal disease or vaccination from your healthcare provider, your local Board of Health (listed in the phone book under government), or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Divisions of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or on the MDPH website at

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/school-immunizations>.