Marin families could be scrambling for kids' activities this summer as camps close, shrink enrollment or otherwise adjust to the coronavirus outbreak.

Dr. Matt Willis, the Marin County public health officer, said he expects he and other Bay Area health officers will release guidelines this week on how summer camps should operate during the pandemic.

“We do plan to allow summer camps to continue,” Willis said. “We do know that the basic guidelines will be the same as we released earlier regarding child care centers — stable groups of no more than 12 children, the same kids and the same staff every day.”

He said additional details will include recommendations on program durations, and standard virus protocols such as daily temperature checks and staggered start times.

“One question is what is the best duration of time,” Willis said. “One proposal is to have them last about a month, with the same small group and the same staff. That's the type of approach we'll be using for the summer programs.”
Willis added he will be coordinating with the new MarinRecovers summer camp task force, which includes leaders from schools, government and health centers.

“The task force will be offering guidance to us moving forward,” Willis said. The task force website is MarinRecovers.com.

Meanwhile, some Marin camps are canceling, some are doing their own version of public health protocols and others are waiting for the official public health orders. Still others are going online.

Audubon Adventure Camp in Tiburon, a popular nature-oriented program, has canceled its summer camp this year out of safety concerns.

Marinwood day camps in north San Rafael is waiting for the latest public health guidelines before establishing how the program will operate.

“We are closely monitoring the advice and recommendations of these experts and will continue to adjust our approach as the situation and recommendations continue to evolve,” the staff said in an email.

In San Rafael, the city is planning to open up summer day camps in mid-June. But officials are waiting for the specific guidelines from Marin County public health before opening registration, said Susan Andrade-Wax, San Rafael recreation director.

“We need to know how many children will be in each group,” she said.

The city has six child care centers that traditionally convert into day camps in the summer, plus a year-round preschool. Since the shelter-in-place, those centers have been using strict protocols for COVID-19, such as limits of 10 or 12 children per group, with the same staff members and same group participants in each.

As soon as the city receives guidelines for summer camps, officials will be able to determine how many children they can enroll, Andrade-Wax said. They also plan to coordinate with other Bay Area counties on summer camp operations as to what activities will be allowed.

“We want to be consistent,” she added.

In Mill Valley, registration opened on Thursday for a series of half-day summer camps from May 18 through June 12 at the Mill Valley Community Center.

The sessions, called “We Live Camp,” are for children whose parents hold jobs considered essential during the pandemic. The sessions include social distance-oriented activities such as arts and crafts, low- or no-touch interactive games and singalongs.
Different camp sessions are available for preschool kids ages 3 to 5, or school kids ages 5 to 11. More information is at 415-383-1370.

In Fairfax, the recreation department is offering small group camps later in the summer, officials said. All of the camps will follow COVID-19 protocols, such as staggered start times, physical distances in common areas and daily temperature checks of staff and campers.

Camp Fairfax, for ages 5-10, will run July 27 to Aug. 14, with the possible addition of the week of July 20. In addition, the town will offer an iPhone photo camp for teens the week of July 6 and a Spanish immersion camp for 5- to 10-year-olds the week of July 20. More information is at townoffairfax.org

In Novato, the parks and recreation department’s Camp Day 2020, originally set for May 16, has been postponed. A new date has not yet been scheduled.

The department normally runs a variety of summer camps, including sports, gymnastics, science and technology and many more. The city website is novato.org.

Camp EDMO, a Bay Area online education nonprofit, has opened registration for summer camps for kids from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. The camps begin the week of June 8.

The weeklong, 2.5-hour morning and afternoon camps also include rallies, snack breaks, games and indoor recreation, said Ed Caballero, Camp EDMO executive director.

“We’re still a camp organization, but the best way we can be of service in this new era is to leverage our existing values to transform ourselves into the most kind, courageous and equitable online learning organization in the world,” he said.

Some education groups — and state and local education administrators — are pushing to use this summer to help students catch up after lost learning due to remote instruction difficulties. The nonprofit National Summer Learning Association says federal virus relief funds are already appropriated that could be used to boost summer learning opportunities.

“The coronavirus crisis exacerbates the digital divide, food insecurity, child care issues and learning losses millions of underserved students and their families face every summer,” Aaron Dworkin, CEO of the association, said in a written statement.
“While we cannot predict the length of this nationwide crisis of extended school closures, now is the time for education and policy leaders to think through how best to prepare, partner and leverage this coming summer as a unique opportunity to serve and support our nation’s children and youth,” he said.

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