

Youth Camp Parent Resource

What you need to know

In 2025, the Texas Legislature updated the laws on youth camps in Texas. Beginning in 2026, youth camps regulated by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) have new requirements, including for enhanced emergency plans, communication systems, and required parental notifications in certain situations.

You should know that not every program calling itself a camp is considered a “youth camp” under the law. The youth camp law and rules do not apply to programs operated by a college or university, regulated by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) as childcare, that don’t offer outdoor activities, or that focus on one specific activity (like gymnastics, baseball, or music).

You can look up whether a program is regulated by DSHS as a youth camp at <https://vo.ras.dshs.state.tx.us/datamart/mainMenu.do>.

As you consider whether to send your child to a youth camp regulated by DSHS, asking camp operators the following questions will help you learn how they are complying with new statutory requirements.

Questions to Ask a Youth Camp Operator

Is the camp licensed? Does it have any licensing deficiencies?

Camps with active licenses in 2025 that applied to renew their license on or before March 31, 2026, may operate in 2026 unless DSHS has specifically revoked their license. You can ask the camp the status of their application with DSHS, what types of deficiencies DSHS found, and the camp’s efforts to address those deficiencies.

DSHS will publish information on camps with ongoing deficiencies through the [Youth Camp Program](#) page.

Did the camp update its emergency plan to comply with the new laws?

Camps are required to submit emergency plans to DSHS and provide plans to parents and local emergency management officials. Under the new law, plans must include the following:

- Procedures for responding to a variety of emergency events
- Procedures for notification and communication to local emergency management, camp staff, and parents and legal guardians
- A designated camp emergency preparedness coordinator
- Evacuation plans with established, illuminated evacuation routes and meeting points
- Plans to shelter-in-place when appropriate
- Methods to monitor weather alerts, and
- Specific actions based on triggers like weather alerts and emergency management instructions.

Will the camp operator provide you the emergency plan?

Camps must provide their current plan to parents of campers participating in a camp session or registered for a future camp session.

Is the camp or any part of the camp located within a floodplain?

Does the camp have campers sleep in cabins within a floodplain?

Camps are required to notify parents if any part of the camp is within a floodplain. Parents must acknowledge receipt of that notification.

Statute only allows camps to have campers sleep in cabins within floodplains under limited circumstances. The camp should provide you with information about whether any cabins fall within these categories and provide you with information about safety precautions if any campers will sleep in those cabins.

If a cabin is located within a floodplain, camps must install emergency ladders that allow access to the roof.

How is the camp monitoring and being notified of weather alerts?

Camps are required to maintain operable radios that can receive real-time weather alerts. The camps must also monitor safety alerts issued by the National Weather Service (NWS) or similar professional weather service, including local river authorities or other local emergency notification systems, as applicable.

Camps are also required to maintain emergency warning systems on-site to alert all campers and staff in the event of an emergency.

Does the camp provide internet service through a broadband service as well as a separate, secondary fiber internet connection?

Camps should explain their telecommunication system capabilities that ensure continuous communication among camp staff, with local authorities, and with parents.

If the camp offers off-site activities, how will the camp comply with the new law?

Each camp must comply with the requirements for emergency plans, evacuation lighting, and emergency warnings, but one camp's plans might look different than another camp's plans based on their activities and geographies. For example, some camps offer primitive camping experiences or off-site activities. The camp should be able to provide you with information about how they will maintain safety in these circumstances.

Will my child receive a safety orientation at the camp?

Within 48 hours of the beginning of each camp session, camps are required to notify campers of the camp's boundaries, potential hazards, and what to do during an emergency according to the camp's emergency plan.

What is the counselor-to-camper ratio at the camp?

Requirements for minimum counselor-to-camper ratios for overnight campers depend on the camper's age:

- 4-5 years of age: 1 counselor for every 5 campers;
- 6-8 years of age: 1 counselor for every 6 campers;
- 9-14 years of age: 1 counselor for every 8 campers; and
- 15-17 years of age: 1 counselor for every 10 campers.

You can ask the camp whether it meets or exceeds these standards. A counselor must be at least 18 years of age.

There are also requirements related to on-site directors for the camp. You can ask the camp about the qualifications of their on-site directors. You can also ask the camp about how it selects its staff, including background checks.

What kind of counselor safety training and background checks does the camp adhere to?

Camps are required to ensure all counselors participate in safety training, including training related to the camp's emergency plans. You can ask the camp for details on how it ensures camp counselors and staff are trained to keep your child safe throughout the camp experience.

How can I make a complaint against a camp?

Camps are required to post a link to the DSHS complaint page on their websites: [Complaint - Youth Camp Program | Texas DSHS](#).

In the event of a complaint, DSHS will investigate and conduct additional inspections to ensure the camp is following all requirements.

For more information, visit [Youth Camp Program | Texas DSHS](#)



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services

Publication No. 23-16938