

Astronomy Camps and COVID Guidelines for June 2022

(March 8, 2022)



Despite our best hopes, COVID-19 is still prevalent in our communities. We are planning in-person Astronomy Camps this June. However, the ongoing pandemic requires that we plan appropriately for both students and staff. Therefore, we will follow CDC, Arizona, and University guidelines in effect at Camp-time, as well as the policies described below that are specific to our remote, mountaintop location.

We cannot require vaccinations. However, we strongly encourage them both for personal safety and also for consideration of other Campers and our staff.

We cannot require testing, although we will endeavor to have “At-Home COVID Test Kits” on site. At present, we will require masks and will implement social distancing and outdoor ventilation as much as possible.

Our observatory site is located at high altitude (9200 feet), two hours from medical facilities. This environment is characterized by very low humidity, 30% less breathable oxygen, cool nighttime temperatures (50’s F), and can be windy and dusty. Normally, students require 1-2 days to acclimate to the altitude. Given that COVID-19 is primarily a respiratory illness, **we strongly encourage our Campers to be vaccinated** in order to reduce the severity of an infection which could be greatly exacerbated by high altitude and dry, dusty conditions. Effective recovery also dictates that we quickly evacuate students with COVID-symptoms off the mountain. Since we have no isolation facilities available to us in Tucson, **we will require that parents be able to retrieve their children within 24 hours notice.**

At our site, boys and girls are housed separately in the astronomers’ dorms, with 3-4 people per room with a common bathroom/shower area. While windows are provided in each room, we typically keep these closed, and darkened, because we often sleep during the morning hours and because insects and moths are greatly attracted to lights at night. At present, it seems prudent to limit the number of students per room, so **we are planning to admit two-thirds of our normal enrollment** (~10 girls and ~10 boys per Camp) while maintaining **a wait list** of students in case the pandemic declines in the coming months.

The limited capacity means even more students will not be able to attend Camp this summer. **We do not like discouraging aspiring students!** If your application is not accepted, please realize that the application is probably excellent, but the oversubscription was simply too high.

We discourage international students from applying because of the restrictions above as well as the CDC’s requirements (below) and potential increased exposure during travel.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/testing-international-air-travelers.html>

Given the fluidity of the pandemic, we recommend that families consider buying **travel insurance**. Here are some resources that have been suggested to us:

<https://www.trawickinternational.com> and <https://www.squaremouth.com/>