Safety Management at Outward Bound

The physical, emotional, and psychological safety of students and staff is a foundational priority for Outward Bound (OB). We aspire to conduct our programs safely at all times, whatever the activity, environment or student population - and our attention on safety is central to who we are.

Outward Bound Approach to Risk

At Outward Bound, we teach students leadership, responsibility, and compassion by exposing them to challenge and adventure. Our course activities and environments, from city parks to the most remote wild spaces, present opportunities for students to develop their judgment, push boundaries to uncover new potential, and build self-confidence by successfully navigating challenges. But these activities and environments also present inherent risks—risks that we accept as fundamental to the learning process. While we work hard to manage and reduce the risk, the possibility of harm and even death can never be eliminated. Safety remains a top priority at Outward Bound, and we incorporate risk management as an essential element in our programs.

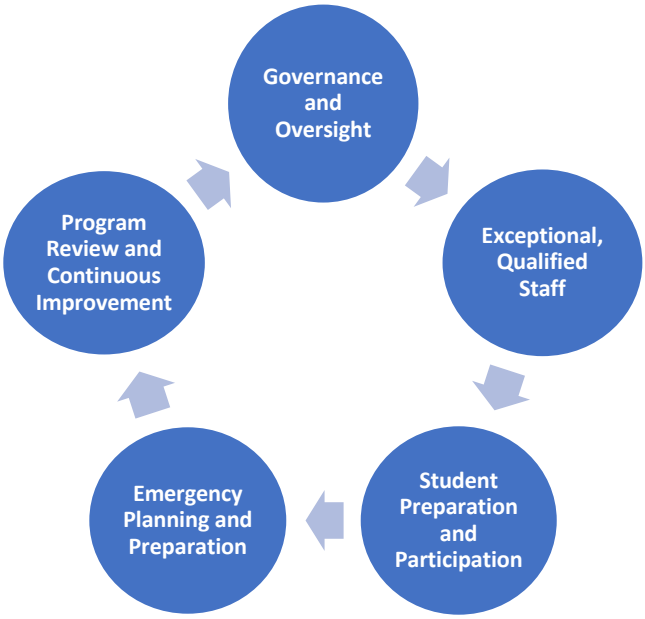
Outward Bound Safety Objectives

Outward Bound believes in a culture of safety that emphasizes transparency, information sharing, collaborative problem solving, and candid discussions at all times; and we are motivated by the following safety objectives.

1. Prevent fatalities, disabling injuries, and serious illnesses.
2. Minimize risk of harm (physical, emotional, psychological) to staff and students.
3. Continuously and critically review operations with a focus on learning and improvement.

Safety Management Principles

Outward Bound maintains a safety management system that incorporates every level of the organization, from School Boards and leaders to Instructors, students and partners. Our safety management system is built on five principles.



Governance and Oversight
Multiple governance and oversight committees are involved in setting and assessing OB approach to risk.

Exceptional, Qualified Staff
Our staff are carefully selected and trained. They are expert educators and risk managers.

Student Preparation and Participation
All students are prepared for and trained to become active participants in our risk management system.

Emergency Planning and Preparation
OB maintains an extensive emergency response system, whether students travel locally or overseas.

Program Review and Continuous Improvement
OB is committed to always learning and improving and audit all aspects or operations regularly.

2020 Risk Management Statistics

Outward Bound collects and tracks data on program related incidents to provide longitudinal perspective on our safety systems and to guide safety processes. As important as incident data is to our understanding of our Schools' safety performance, it is not the final word on safety effectiveness. Safety in programming and support operations is an emergent property of a complex system in which industry and government regulations, business decisions, School culture and mission, the actions of staff and students, and the environment all play a role. We present this data to make two primary points:

1. Accidents can and do happen, sometimes they are serious, and a small but important number are fatal; and
2. In almost all instances, the conditions that can produce fatal outcomes are identified and mitigated successfully.

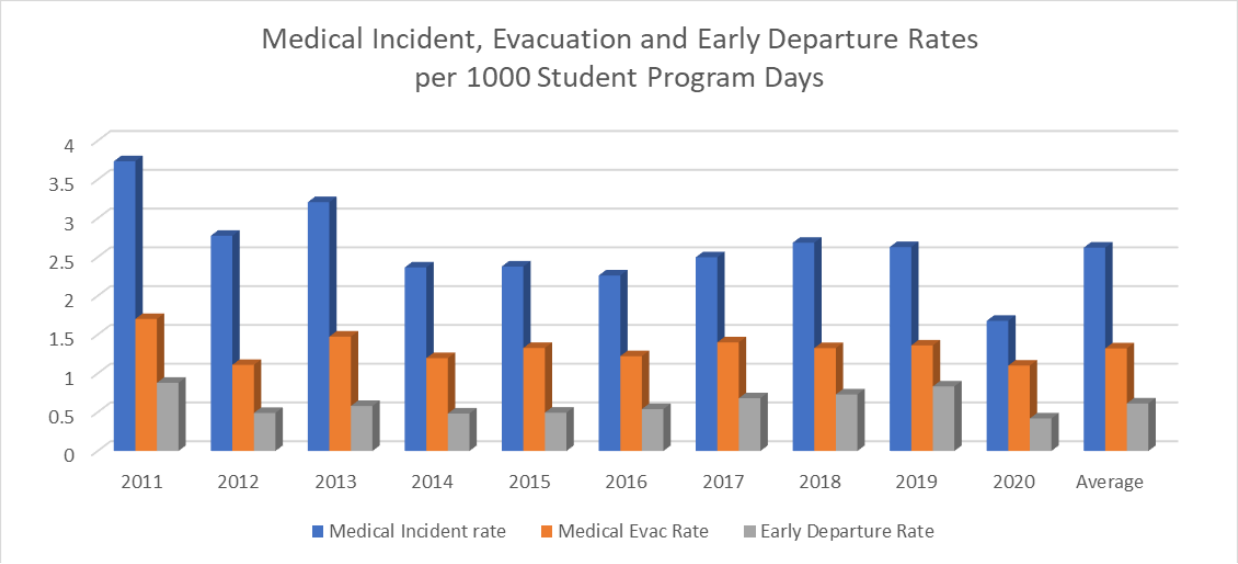
Neither of these points is to be taken lightly. The work of Outward Bound staff is to learn from past accidents, diligently apply and teach the principles, policies and procedures that have evolved from our experience, and to remain alert, flexible and resilient to respond to and mitigate the risks inherent in our programs.

Outward Bound Injuries and Illnesses 2011-2020

In the last decade, reportable incidents have averaged 188 student injuries and 162 student illnesses each year. Looking at the last decade as a whole:

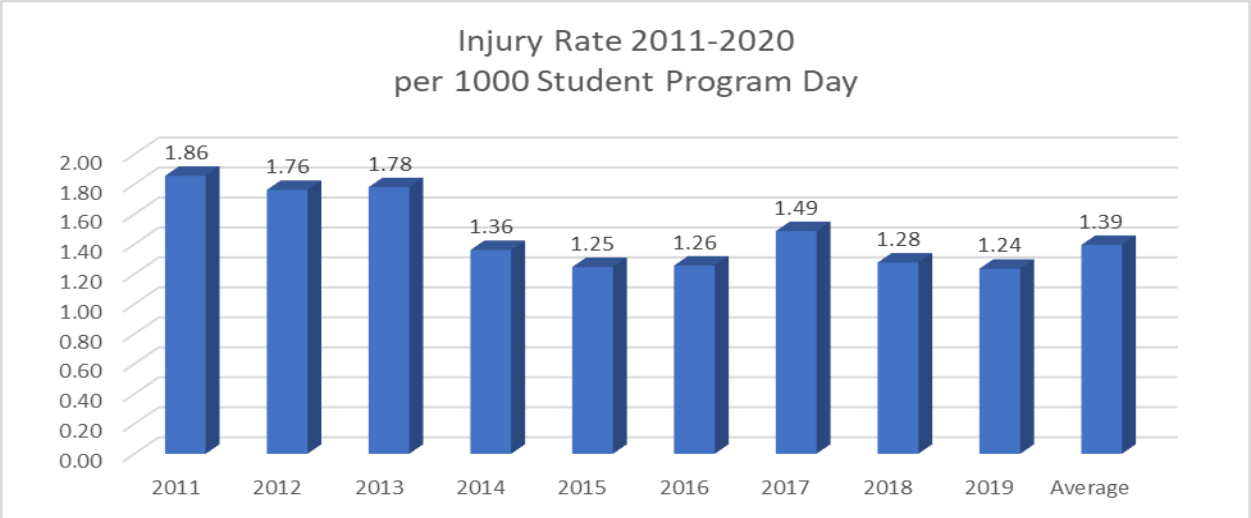
Injury Statistics	Illness Statistics
0.47% of all students are injured	0.54% of all students become ill
42% of injured students are evacuated	59% of ill students are evacuated
20% of injured students do not finish the course	28% of ill students do not finish the course
30% of injured students have sprains/strains	17% of ill students have gastrointestinal problems
8% of injured students have lacerations	16% of ill students have infections
5% of injured students have dislocations/fractures	6% of ill students have a communicable respiratory disease

Roughly half of our reportable injuries and illnesses require evacution from the field; of those, about half generally result in an early departure.



Outward Bound Injury Rates Compared with Risks in Familiar Contexts

In the last decade, not counting COVID-19-truncated 2020, Outward Bound has averaged just under 1.5 injuries per 1000 student program days (SPDs), with a range from 1.24 in 2019 (187 total injuries over 151,334 SPDs) to 1.86 in 2011 (230 over 123,945 SPDs).



Other sports and recreational pursuits also have injury rates that are calculated to study their risks. There's some variation in definitions, but generally they include injuries that require treatment by a medical professional and/or some loss in participation time.[i] Participant days and athlete-exposures refer to a single practice session or competition and are roughly analogous to student program days.

NCAA sports (all)[ii]	3.96 injuries per 1000 athlete-exposures
College outdoor club mountain biking[iii]	7.5 injuries per 1000 athlete-exposures
Women's college gymnastics practice[iv]	6.1 injuries per 1000 athlete-exposures
Sailing dinghies[v]	4.6 injuries per 1000 participant days

Data from Common Team Sports

Data is injuries that require medical attention and/or a loss of playing time, per 1000 athlete-exposures. Where available, data from games and practices are separated, as the risk is much higher in competition.

Age of Athlete	High School[vi]	College[vii]	All Ages 5+[viii]
Years Included	2005-6	1988-2004	2011-2014
Boys'/Men's Football (American)	2.54 (practice) 12.09 (games)	9.6 (practice) 35.9 (games)	5.5
Girls'/Women's Soccer	1.1 (practice) 5.21 (games)	5.2 (practice) 16.4 (games)	1.7
Boys'/Men's Basketball	1.46 (practice) 2.98 (games)	4.3 (practice) 9.9 (games)	4.7
Girls'/Women's Basketball	1.37 (practice) 3.60 (games)	4.0 (practice) 7.7 (games)	1.8

From this we see that the risk of injury on Outward Bound courses is comparable to high school team sports practice.

[i] Many readily available statistics on sports injuries focus on prevalence rather than incidence. In sports injury, the prevalence is the proportion of athletes with an injury at a given time. Incidence is the number of new injuries over a given time, relative to the number of athletes. These and other studies use emergency department visits to define injury, which is a different metric to ours. Some of the most rigorous studies use athlete-hours, and while these will be the most precise, we cannot use them for comparison because OB doesn't divide SPDs by activity or by hour.

[ii] Hootman, J. M., Dick, R., & Agel, J. (2007). **Epidemiology of collegiate injuries for 15 sports:** summary and recommendations for injury prevention initiatives. *Journal of athletic training*, *42*(2), 311–319. Epidemiology of Collegiate Injuries for 15 Sports: Summary and Recommendations for Injury Prevention Initiatives (nih.gov)

[iii] **Injury and Illness in College Outdoor Education.** Gaudio, Flavio G. et al. Wilderness & Environmental Medicine, Volume 21, Issue 4, 363 – 370. Injury and Illness in College Outdoor Education (WEM Journal)

[iv] Hootman, J. M., Dick, R., & Agel, J. (2007). **Epidemiology of collegiate injuries for 15 sports**: summary and recommendations for injury prevention initiatives. *Journal of athletic training*, *42*(2), 311–319.Epidemiology of Collegiate Injuries for 15 Sports: Summary and Recommendations for Injury Prevention Initiatives (nih.gov)

[v] Nathanson A. **Sailing Injuries: A Review of the Literature**. R I Med J (2013). 2019 Feb 1;102(1):23-27. PMID: 30709070. 2019-02-23-wilderness-nathanson.pdf (rimed.org)

[vi] Rechel JA, Yard EE, Comstock RD. **An epidemiologic comparison of high school sports injuries** sustained in practice and competition. J Athl Train. 2008;43(2):197-204. doi:10.4085/1062-6050-43.2.197 An Epidemiologic Comparison of High School Sports Injuries Sustained in Practice and Competition (nih.gov)

[vii] Hootman, J. M., Dick, R., & Agel, J. (2007). **Epidemiology of collegiate injuries for 15 sports:** summary and recommendations for injury prevention initiatives. *Journal of athletic training*, *42*(2), 311–319.Epidemiology of Collegiate Injuries for 15 Sports: Summary and Recommendations for Injury Prevention Initiatives (nih.gov)

[viii] Sheu Y, Chen LH, Hedegaard H. **Sports- and recreation-related injury episodes in the United States, 2011–2014**. National health statistics reports; no 99. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2016. National Health Statistics Reports, Number 99, November 18, 2016 (cdc.gov)