



TO: SOI Regional Presidents & Managing Directors, Regional Communications Staff, and SOI Staff

FROM: Jason Teitler, Senior Vice President, Global Communications & Brand Lead

RE: Communications Response to COVID-19

DATE: 9 April 2020

Dear Colleagues,

As COVID-19 continues to impact Special Olympics operations and programming around the world, it is essential we present consistent messages that are relevant given the current news cycle. This is important in order to maintain and grow our brand's integrity, defend our reputation, and guard against vulnerabilities to our programming locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

SOI Regional Presidents and Managing Directors, in close collaboration with your respective Regional Communications staff, are asked to **share the following guidance with all Programs in your Regions by Friday, 10 April.**

MEDIA RELATIONS

- **Program leads and other identified spokespeople who have been provided background information on SOI's COVID-19 position are the only people who are authorized to speak with media about how the pandemic is impacting our athletes, events, and operations.** Anyone speaking to media about this topic should alert their Regional Communications lead, who will alert SOI Communications. It is important to update the central Communications team for tracking trends and any need for managing crisis communications.
- Regions and Programs are encouraged to share stories with media that have been posted on www.specialolympics.org. These stories should be shared journalistically and not amended to include viewpoints counter to those provided by SOI.

- Programs are encouraged to share COVID-19 resources available on www.specialolympics.org. These materials should not be modified in any way, except for translation.

APPROVED KEY MESSAGES

- After each Program analyzes their local media and consumer environments' interests in non-COVID-19 stories, Regions and Programs should feel comfortable conducting ongoing pitch efforts around local programming. On the subject of COVID-19 in relation to Special Olympics, the following statement should be provided **without additional comment or interpretation. Staff should refrain from engaging in speculation or editorializing about current or future guidance.**

Due to recent developments tied to the global spread of the coronavirus/COVID-19, we have advised Special Olympics Programs around the world to suspend all sport training and competition activities, and other activations involving our athletes, through 31 May 2020, when the situation will be reevaluated. Our decisions have been informed by consultations with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the latest guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO).

- People with ID are one of the most vulnerable populations to potential exposure to COVID-19. People with ID are at increased risk of respiratory disease, of influenza, of pneumonia, and of death from these causes, as well as obesity and diabetes. People with Down syndrome can have compromised immune systems and low tone in the airway. Some people with cerebral palsy also have scoliosis and lower muscle tone, which may cause problems with secretions. All of these increase risk. **However, the most important risk for people with ID is not the underlying condition, but the lack of access to health care.** Although there are **no data that exist yet**, for these reasons, people with ID are considered at increased risk for COVID-19 and its consequences. This is a group of people who routinely are left behind so that's why at Special Olympics, we are constantly working to provide access to health care for people with intellectual disabilities.
- No group of people should be denied access to quality care—and that includes people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities should have the same access to quality care (including COVID-19 diagnostic tests and ventilators/respirators) as people without disabilities. In times of crisis, generalizations or stereotypes of a person's diagnosis or disability cannot be used to determine care. Individual assessments must determine treatments—and those assessments should not be made based on bias or uninformed judgements. **Our work to educate health care professionals is designed to ensure that this doesn't happen.**
- Since there are no medications specifically approved for the treatment of patients with COVID-19, Special Olympics staff should exercise particular caution around discussing

the topic of treatments for COVID-19. A number of drugs approved for other conditions and new investigational drugs are being studied in clinical studies underway across the globe. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities should not be excluded from clinical trials for new medications, and should not be using any treatments outside clinical trials until they have been proven effective and are recommended by recognized country health authorities, such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or National Institutes of Health.

- Coronavirus can spread between people interacting in close proximity – for example, speaking, coughing or sneezing – even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms. Special Olympics is following guidance from the CDC in relation to wearing face coverings and is urging everyone in our community to do so when leaving home to conduct essential tasks like visiting the doctor or food shopping. We are working to ensure that our athletes are aware of how to use household items to make face coverings, like US Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams showed in his [30 second video](#).
- Special Olympics is committed to doing everything possible to prevent COVID-19 spread. We have armed our athletes with information on how to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19 including a video on handwashing that features one of our athletes, and have equipped athletes and families with access to at-home resources, including fitness videos to stay healthy and fit and emotional well-being graphics and webinars to reduce stress and enable stronger social connectedness. We are also creating a simple training for health care professionals on how to treat people with ID as it relates to COVID-19, for everyone from paramedics, to physicians, to nurses, to all frontline healthcare workers around the globe.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Special Olympics owned social media channels, and **individuals using personal social media** channels to represent Special Olympics during COVID-19, should be used for:

- Information and education around coronavirus, leveraging the approved messaging provided by SOI communications.
- Communicating existing event cancelations and new virtual trainings, event activations and other virtual connection opportunities.
- Sharing existing resources around COVID-19 like [the FAQ](#) or [this infographic](#) and encouraging individuals to follow the direction of local health officials, the CDC and the WHO.
- Sharing media highlights of Special Olympics athletes and leaders providing valuable contributions to our communities, like [The TODAY Show clip](#) or [this Times-Union opinion piece](#) from Special Olympics New York (USA) CEO Stacey Hengsterman.
- Sharing resources on how to engage with *School of Strength* and *Fit5* programming to keep athletes active and connected.

- Sharing existing resources from programming in Health, Sports, Education and Athlete Leadership as shared by those programmatic teams or as shared on @SpecialOlympics.
- Amplifying [positive messages and actions](#) being shared by athletes, family members, coaches and volunteers on their personal social media channels. Try to tag @SpecialOlympics or use #ChooseToInclude so SOI can help amplify further.
- Appropriate crisis communications issues in coordination with your Regional leads and SOI Communications.
- Representing the Special Olympics brand in a responsible manner that demonstrates compassion, unity, leadership, and fun.
- Sharing content from @SpecialOlympics platforms and other Program platforms.

Special Olympics owned social media channels, and individuals using personal social media channels to represent Special Olympics during COVID-19, should **NOT** be used for:

- Speculation or offering of opinions on a crisis or on-going situations in the news cycle. **Use approved messaging only.**
- Responding directly to media inquiries without coordinating with your Program, and if necessary, Regional leadership.
- Sharing health or personal information of any athlete or Program participant that may be affected by COVID-19 unless coordinated with and approved by your Regional leadership and SOI Communications.
- Offering opinion or criticizing governmental responses or actions to COVID-19. If you flag a concern worth raising, notify your Program or Regional communications lead BEFORE posting or responding.
- Sharing Zoom links. To help avoid “Zoom-Bombing” please follow these tips:
 - Change screensharing to “Host Only”
 - Disable “Join Before Host” so people can’t cause trouble
 - Disable “File Transfer” so there’s no digital virus sharing
 - Disable “Allow Removed Participants to Rejoin” so booted attendees can’t slip back in

You are encouraged to copy and paste these sample posts:

- People with intellectual disabilities are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. Together, we have the power to ensure no one is forgotten during this critical time around the world. Show your commitment to people with ID: www.jointherevolution.org/pledge. #InclusiveHealth
- Access to quality healthcare shouldn't depend on who you are. People with intellectual disabilities have more limited access to health services, despite being among the more

vulnerable to COVID-19. See how you can help our athletes stay safe:
<http://j.mp/3b2n75V>. #InclusiveHealth ([PAIR WITH CORONA INFO GIF](#))

- On average, people with intellectual disabilities die 16 years younger than everyone else & are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. See how you can help @SpecialOlympics athletes stay healthy & safe during these times:
<http://j.mp/3b2n75V>. #InclusiveHealth ([PAIR WITH HANDWASHING GRAPHIC](#))
- Social isolation can lead to increased depression & loneliness, especially for people with intellectual disabilities. During these difficult times, please keep @SpecialOlympics athletes in mind and check-in with a note or a phone call! <http://bit.ly/3b2n75V>
#ChooseToInclude
- Our @SpecialOlympics athletes work hard on & off the field. Now, you can join them! Check out the new School of Strength, an at-home fitness program for all abilities, exclusively here: <http://j.mp/2PvsSRf>. #InclusiveHealth
- Looking for a workout routine you can do during #QuarantineLife? Check out the newly launched School of Strength and join @SpecialOlympics athletes & @WWE Superstar @BeckyLynchWWE for an intense workout, designed for all fitness levels: <http://j.mp/2PvsSRf>. #InclusiveHealth
- Our @SpecialOlympics athletes have teamed up with @WWE for a whole new at-home work out to help you stay fit & reach your fitness goals! Join them & Superstar Becky Lynch & get started: <http://j.mp/2PvsSRf>. #InclusiveHealth

Please also feel free to share or adapt any of these Best Practice examples below:

- [SONY #VirtualHigh5](#) video
- [#VirtualHigh5](#) tweet
- [Athlete encouragement](#) video
- [SO Italia Video](#)
- [Strong Minds infographic](#)
- [Dr. Bazzano's fight for #InclusiveHealth](#)
- [Caleb working the #Fit5 challenge from SOFL](#)
- [Kellen working out in the School of Strength](#)

ENDS