

North America Return to Activity Sport Resources & Considerations

Special Olympics



Overview:

Special Olympics North America supports a safe return to activities and play for all participants under the guidance of Special Olympics, Inc. and that of national / state / provincial / territorial / tribal and local guidelines.

In addition to the SOI Return to Activities Protocol – **which is our movement’s primary guidance document**, we’ve captured some additional general and sport-related considerations and resources, and attempted to group them by general theme/topic. We hope these additional thought-starters and leading practices from peer organizations will better help your Program make decisions that are right for you based on your unique activities, circumstances and capacity.

This document is by no means a prescriptive, complete or exhaustive list of Return to Activity / Return to Play considerations: we recognize we will all learn, adapt and adjust as we make our way through this pandemic.

The information in this document and the SOI Protocol document is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional legal or public health advice. The knowledge and circumstances around COVID-19 are changing constantly and, as such, Special Olympics makes no representation and assumes no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of this information. Further, you should seek advice from medical professionals and/or public health officials if you have specific questions about symptoms and/or diagnoses related to COVID-19. Similarly, Programs should consult with legal and/or insurance counsel regarding any liability or coverage related questions.

General Resources		
Special Olympics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOI COVID-19 Resources • SOI Return to Activities Protocol • Return to Activities - SONA Program Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Specialty Insurance (US Programs Only) – Contact Jina Doyle at Jdoyle@americanspecialty.com for insurance or risk management advice.
Government Agencies, Healthcare, Media & Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - COVID 19 • World Health Organization (WHO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDC - Youth Sports Guidance • Aspen Institute • Event Safety Alliance
Multi-Sport Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USOPC • NFHS • NRPA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCAA • NAIA • USSSA

Sport Risk Assessment Guidance:

Low Risk	Sports that can be done with social distancing or individually with no sharing of equipment or the ability to clean the equipment between use by competitors.
Moderate Risk	Sports that involve close, sustained contact, but with protective equipment in place that may reduce the likelihood of respiratory particle transmission between participants OR intermittent close contact OR group sports OR sports that use equipment that can't be cleaned between participants.
High Risk	Sports that involve close, sustained contact between participants, lack of significant protective barriers, and high probability that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants.

Moderate and High-Risk sports can still be active during the “significant risk” level of the protocol in the form of individual skills training / development activities.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS SPORTS		
Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk
Athletics - Running Events	Athletics - Field Events / Relays	Judo
Swimming - Individual Events	Swimming - Relays	Competitive Cheer
Bocce - Singles	Bocce - Doubles / Team*	Handball
Tennis - Singles	Tennis - Doubles	Basketball*
Badminton - Singles	Badminton Doubles	Netball
Table Tennis - Singles	Table Tennis - Doubles	Flag Football*
Cycling	Gymnastics (Artistic)*	Dance Sport
Equestrian	Gymnastics (Rhythmic)*	Floor Hockey
Golf	Bowling	Floorball
Open Water Swimming	Powerlifting*	
Triathlon	Roller Skating	
Alpine Skiing	Cricket	
Cross Country Skiing	Baseball*	
Figure Skating	Softball*	
Snowboarding	Volleyball	
Snowshoeing	Sailing	
Speed Skating	Football - Soccer	
	Speed Skating Relays	

*Could be potentially considered lower risk with appropriate cleaning of equipment and use of masks by participants.

Sport Specific Resources

Not all Governing Bodies and Sport Federations currently have return to play information on their websites and many will amend or update along the way. Please continue to check websites for sport specific information and updates.

Summer Sports Governing Bodies & Resources		
<p style="text-align: center;">Athletics (Track & Field)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Track & Field • World Athletics 	<p style="text-align: center;">Badminton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Badminton • Badminton England • Badminton World Federation 	<p style="text-align: center;">Baseball</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Baseball • Little League • World Baseball Softball Confederation
<p style="text-align: center;">Basketball</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIBA • USA Basketball • Jr NBA 	<p style="text-align: center;">Bocce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SONA Bocce Training Considerations Sample 	<p style="text-align: center;">Bowling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Bowling Congress • Brunswick Bowling Centers • World Bowling • SONA Bowling Training Considerations Sample
<p style="text-align: center;">Cricket</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Cricket Council 	<p style="text-align: center;">Competitive Cheer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Cheer • International Cheer Union 	<p style="text-align: center;">Cycling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Cycling • Union Cycliste Internationale
<p style="text-align: center;">Equestrian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Equestrian • Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Flag Football</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFL FLAG • USA Football • Pop Warner • SONA Flag Football Training Considerations Sample 	<p style="text-align: center;">Football/Soccer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Youth Soccer • Soccer Social Distancing • Elite Clubs National League • Federation Internationale de Football Association
<p style="text-align: center;">Golf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USGA • Royal Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrew's 	<p style="text-align: center;">Gymnastics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Gymnastics • Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Handball</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Team Handball • International Handball Federation
<p style="text-align: center;">Judo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Judo Federation • USA Judo 	<p style="text-align: center;">Kayaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Canoe • International Canoe Federation (ICF) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Netball</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Netball Federation (INF) • Netball Australia
<p style="text-align: center;">Open Water Swimming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Swimming • USA Triathlon • Swim England • Federation Internationale de Natation (FINA) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Powerlifting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Powerlifting • International Powerlifting Federation 	<p style="text-align: center;">Roller Skating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team USA Roller Sports • World Skate

Summer Sports Governing Bodies & Resources Cont.

Sailing	Softball	Swimming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Sailing • World Sailing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Softball • Little League • Sports UAC • World Baseball Softball Confederation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Swimming • Swimming Canada • Federation International de Natation (FINA)
Table Tennis	Tennis	Triathlon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) • USA Table Tennis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Tennis Association (USTA) • International Tennis federation (ITF) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Triathlon • International Triathlon Union
Volleyball		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Volleyball • Federation Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) 		

Winter Sports Governing Bodies & Resources

Alpine Skiing	Cross Country Skiing	Dance Sport
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Ski and Snowboard • Federation Internationale de Ski 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Ski and Snowboard • Federation Internationale de Ski • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance USA • USA Dancing • World DanceSport Federation
Figure Skating	Floorball	Floor Hockey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Figure Skating • International Skating Union (ISU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Floorball • International Floorball Federation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SONA Floor Hockey Training Considerations Sample • USA Hockey
Speed Skating	Snowboarding	Snowshoeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Speedskating • International Skating Union (ISU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Ski and Snowboard • Federation Internationale de Ski 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Snowshoe Association • World Snowshoe Federation (WSSF)

Additional Considerations

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE):

- Do we have the ability (financial, procurement, distribution) to provide everyone with appropriate PPE as needed?
- Have we agreed upon the forms of PPE we will be requiring or recommending be used at activities (masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and spray, personal water bottles, temporal thermometers, disposable gloves, personal towels, etc.)?
- Do we have a communications plan for all participants of any S.O. activity (athletes, Unified partners, volunteers, coaches, officials, venue staff, family members/caregivers, spectators, donors/sponsors, etc.) to let them know the PPE expectations are (what they must/should bring, what S.O. will provide, etc.)?

Venue:

- Is there a safe training location available that meets or exceeds the standards of our protocol?
- What assurances do we have from venue of implementation of their sanitization measures/procedures?
- Have we closely reviewed the contract (and consulted with American Specialty Insurance on contract language and/or certificates of insurance) to be clear if we are or are not expected to take on the responsibility and labor of sanitizing their venue?
- Have coach / local volunteer / staff do venue walk-through prior to practice / activity to assess all necessary protocol, safety and activity modification needs.
- Enough space at venue for extra spacing for all sport and non-sport elements of activity (coach meetings, hydration and resting areas, skills and drills stations)
- Will other entities / groups be using the venue at the same time Special Olympics is? Can we find out what safety measures are they taking? How can we inform them of our safety precautions and expectations if they are com-mingling with our participants?
- Consider staggered locker room use (if allowing use at all – may opt to make off limits) so as to not unintentionally create congestion area.

Event Signage and Notices:

- What signage and notices language/scripts will we provide our local training programs / coaches for them to post?
- Use both picture/icon-based (as well as language-based notices) for those who experience difficulty reading.
- Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances and exits, and in restrooms) that promote protective measures and describe how to stop the spread of germs such as by properly washing hands and properly wearing a cloth face covering
 - Example Signage:
 - Do not enter if you are exhibiting any signs of illness such as sneezing, coughing, sniffles, have a fever, or don't feel well

- If you are repeatedly sneezing or coughing, you may be asked to immediately leave the premises
- All athletes, staff, volunteers, and spectators should practice responsible social distancing by remaining at least 6 ft apart whenever possible
- All athletes, staff, volunteers, and spectators should wear PPE such as face masks whenever applicable
- Wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer upon entrance, during the event, before and after you eat, and as you leave
- Avoid touching your face including your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Broadcast regular announcements on public announcement (PA) system

Transportation / Arrivals / Departures:

- Consider scheduled staggered participant pick up / drop off times.
- Consider increasing the amount of time between practices and competitions to allow for one group to depart before another group enters the facility. This also allows for more time to clean the facility between uses.
- Try to avoid entering venue (more applicable for indoor venues) at same time as athletes – attempt to reduce human bottlenecks / proximity in and out of venue.
- Athletes and Unified partners: arrive already dressed and sport-ready.
- Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who is sick to their home or to a healthcare facility. If you are calling an ambulance or bringing someone to the hospital, try to call first to alert them that the person may have COVID-19 and notify their family / caregiver.

Staff/Volunteers/Coaches/Officials:

- Do we have enough personnel available, trained and comfortable with the protocols to meet athlete ratio needs and conduct safe activities? Have go/no-go plan if not enough qualified personnel available.
- Have back-up staffing plan for coaches, volunteers and officials: cross-train staff and create a roster of trained back-up personnel.
- How will we educate and train volunteers, coaches, officials (including helping them understand if they themselves may be considered at higher risk)?
- Consider making the SOI eLearning COVID-19 course as optional or required prior to volunteering, coaching, officiating, or participating in certain SO activities?
- How will we communicate/message the “why?” behind our increased safety and health measures in volunteer education and communications, especially as many volunteers don’t understand that our athletes (and other participants may be at higher risk)?
- Consider having volunteers/teams of volunteers whose sole purpose is to concentrate on sanitizing, cleaning, enforcing athlete social distancing and safety behavior expectations compliance (at practices and events) so coaches can coach.
- Consider having volunteers/teams of volunteers whose sole purpose is to concentrate protocol / behavior education and compliance for spectators, family members/caregivers, and venue staff.

- What kind of extra volunteers might we want? Health care professionals to assist with participant screenings, on-site observation for symptoms, and/or in the event of on-site quarantine needs?
- How will we educate volunteers and coaches as to the authority they have to send someone home from a practice or event if they do not meet the screening requirements or do not to the participant agreement terms.
- How will we communicate to and educate coaches that it's OK to not come back if *they* don't feel safe to help alleviate fear of "letting the athletes down."
- Coaches, volunteers and officials must social distance at all times! Stay at least 6 feet apart.

Equipment:

- What is equipment pre and post cleaning procedure?
- Coach keeps all equipment / equipment bag in between practices and sanitizes at start and end of every practice.
- Equipment/gear for each person (their own or provided): put athlete or partner's name on it with tape or other means.
- Be aware of any damaging effects frequent use of some sanitizing products may have on certain forms of gear or equipment.

Spectators / Family Members / Caregivers:

- Consult the return to Activities Protocol for guidance for each risk level, but in general, make best efforts to reduce the number of non-essential personnel at practices/events.
- Family members / caregivers may need to drop off and pick-up only or stay in car during practice / activity.
- Have separate or staggered screening area or time for spectators / family members / caregivers.
- Based on the risk level your Program/event falls in to, spectators either should or should be encouraged to social distance if they sit in stands. Program / volunteers may need to mark off minimum distances in stands or on the ground to create clear seating areas.

Sport: Practices and Competitions

- Split squads/practices: do we have enough venue availability? Can our coaches give that much time?
- Modify all sports to meet any applicable social distancing requirements.
- Consider having no spectators at practices and/or some events.
- Use physical guidance (ropes, tape on floor, chalked areas, coning off areas) to help ensure social distancing.
- Break athletes into small groups that stay together and do not co-mingle. Keep players together in small groups with dedicated coaches or staff, and make sure that each group of players and coaches avoid mixing with other groups as much as possible. Teams might consider having the same group of players stay with the same coach or having the same group of players rotate among coaches.

- Put out cones or chalk ground to ensure social distancing for each player to have personal area for static stretching. Similarly, designated lanes could be set up for any dynamic stretches or running warm up.
- Modify practices, skills, drills, scrimmages, to limit the time athletes and partners spend physically close to others.
- Ability to engage in social distancing while not actively engaged in play (e.g., during practice, on the sideline, or in the dugout). During times when players are not actively participating in practice or competition, attention should be given to maintaining social distancing by increasing space between players on the sideline, dugout, or bench. Additionally, coaches can encourage athletes to use downtime for individual skill-building work or cardiovascular conditioning, rather than staying clustered together.
- Mark off areas along bench, ground, fence or other stationary point of reference with tape/chalk/cones/surveyor's tape to give each athlete same "spot" for gear, rest, when not active at practice every week for consistency.

Support Coping and Resilience:

- Encourage participants to take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media if they are feeling overwhelmed or distressed.
- Promote healthy eating, exercising, getting sleep, and finding time to unwind.
- Encourage participants to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling.
- Many participants are going through challenging times. Some may have lost loved ones, lost jobs, been disconnected from friends and school and haven't had the structure they are accustomed to. This creates a lot of stress that can show up in different ways. You can help reduce this stress through your communication approach. Special Olympics has shared the Bridges Model, (more on Bridges) which have some helpful insights on leadership in times of crisis. The CDC also has some helpful useful resources regarding talking with youth, which include: Helping Children Cope and Talking with Children. Helping Athletes Cope with Covid was published by NCYS.