



## Overview

This guidance for returning to Special Olympics activities is based on information provided by Special Olympics, Inc., the latest medical information available and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The information should be used to help prepare local SONC programs for a safe return to activities. This document summarizes plans. **Throughout this document “participants” are defined as all athletes, Unified partners, coaches, volunteers, family members, caregivers, staff or others in attendance of an activity.**

These are intended as minimum guidelines for Special Olympics North Carolina (SONC) local programs as they consider returning to activities and is intended to supplement – not replace – any state, local, or tribal government health and safety laws, rules and regulations with which similar organizations must comply. **In all cases, the more stringent set of guidelines is to be followed no matter the source** (i.e. if SONC has more stringent guidelines, these are to be followed. If the local authority has more restrictions in place, those are to be followed.).

Additionally, the information in this document is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The knowledge and circumstances around COVID-19 are changing constantly and, as such, SONC 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, SONC local programs should immediately consult with the SONC staff regarding any liability or insurance coverage related questions.

Currently there is no way of completely eliminating the risk of infection, especially since many within the Special Olympics movement (with and without intellectual disabilities) are at greater risk for complications from COVID-19. If there is a significant change in the rate of infection and the status of the state, the proposed SONC return to activity protocol laid out in this document may change at any given time.

## Guiding Principles

1. The health and safety of all members of the Special Olympics movement is paramount.
2. Beyond a sports organization, Special Olympics is a movement for and by people with intellectual disabilities (ID), and its guidance must be inclusive and directed at the unique needs and abilities of people with ID.
3. Relevant SOI, CDC, and North Carolina guidelines should serve as minimum standards. In addition, consideration should be given to local and community authorities in that if there are more conservative/restrictive guidelines, these



should be followed.

4. Guidance is based on current medical information available at the time of publication. As knowledge of COVID-19 is changing rapidly, guidance will continue to evolve.
5. We all want to provide some level of activity for the athletes and recognize the need to provide whatever services we can to them.

## Plans for Return to Activity – January 1 through May 28, 2021

### **Fitness Training from Home**

SONC will continue to make training programs available for athletes and Unified partners.

Current plans include:

- Monthly fitness challenges in January and February (similar to those done in the summer of 2020) **all as a part of the Winter Challenge Series.**
- Partner Up Power Up Unified fitness program – March 2 through May 14.

### **Recommended sports for winter/spring season**

SONC is providing modifications for sport training that can either be carried out at home or in the small in-person group settings laid out in the following section. Athletes can opt to simply do the fitness training at home or to also add the sport component.

### **In-person Training**

**Due to the increasing prevalence of COVID-19 across the state, effective immediately, no in-person training shall be conducted until at least February 28, 2021.**

**As soon as in-person trainings are once again allowed, whenever that may be, all parameters laid out for the 2020 fall season will stay in place. Indoor gatherings will not be allowed until further notice.**

All in-person training should abide by the following:

- Everyone involved is comfortable with in-person training. Any participant can opt out at any time.
- **In-person gatherings should be held outdoors only.**
- It is a consistent group of the same 10 or less people. This number will stay the same as the fall 2020 guidelines.
- The local program orders and provides Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- The “Who is At High Risk” document is shared with all participants.
- The Participant Code of Conduct and Risk Acknowledgement Form is completed by each participant.



- Athlete Participation Packets do not need to be collected for basic participation in the spring Partner Up Power Up program. If athletes do gather in person for training in the spring outside of the school environment, updated forms must be on file before participation.
- All guidelines for in-person gatherings provided by both the state of North Carolina, local entities and relevant facilities, and those laid out in the code of conduct are followed.
- It is currently required that all people wear masks at all times (even on the field of play) if gathering in person.
- The on-site screening process is conducted and followed. This process is provided in detail in supporting materials.
- **If any SONC trainings/activities happen in school facilities within the usual school operations/schedule, they may fall under all guidelines the school system has in place for their students rather than those provided by SONC. All of these functions would be considered school activities.**

## **Competition Events**

SONC will not hold any competitions at the state or invitational level any time **before June 30, 2021**. This includes the SONC and Southeast Winter Games for Alpine skiing and snowboarding, the Winter Games for figure skating, the cheerleading tournament, Southeast Swimming Invitational **and the Summer Games**. **Decisions about additional state-level events such as Fall Tournament are forthcoming.**

Additionally, SONC recommends that no local program hold any competition events during this period, including spring games. In addition to the numerous considerations for in-person activities, the great majority of local events are school-based. With the many school systems continuing to opt for either online or hybrid education (Plans B or C), school-based events are simply not feasible, and many school districts have already announced that field trips and school events will not be allowed. The extensive planning and preparation that normally goes into a spring games is also a great consideration and cannot be done in a realistic and quality manner to prepare for the spring of 2021.

## **Fundraising special events (golf and fishing tournaments, polar plunges, etc.)**

Fundraising events have a lot of unique factors and there are ways to still conduct these events with adjustments. Please consult with SONC staff about any special event fundraisers so that each event can be assessed individually in order to determine if it will be possible in 2021.

Polar Plunge events are normally prevalent at the start of the year. SONC realizes that the great majority of local program fundraising is done around the spring games event and this fundraising can now be done to support other spring programming. A virtual [Plunge in Place](#)



program has been developed and [all resources are available for local planning](#).

## **Healthy Athletes**

Because of the nature of Healthy Athlete screening events, no in-person events will be conducted during this time period. After some successful virtual screenings in the fall of 2020, SONC hopes to see more of these opportunities. Information about how to still offer these events in an alternative manner is forthcoming.

## **Unified Champion Schools**

All Unified Champion Schools (UCS) programming is conducted within schools. For this reason, UCS activities will occur in accordance with the guidelines of that school district. Where school districts are to the point of allowing in-person activities for groups of students in the school, UCS activities can be included.

UCS can serve as an important resource and alternative to the typically offered Special Olympics events in the schools since they will be within a school and inevitably involve smaller group gatherings.

## **Young Athletes**

Materials and equipment have been developed to implement the Young Athletes program at home. Visit the web site at [www.sonc.net](http://www.sonc.net) for more information. If a local program wants to conduct an in-person Young Athletes session, it needs to follow all of the guidelines listed in this document.

## **Leadership Meetings**

While virtual/online meetings are strongly encouraged, meetings may occur in-person if the parameters for in-person gatherings, as laid out in this document, are followed.



## So what does the first half of 2021 look like?

Statewide we will focus on virtual and small group grassroots opportunities.

January	Monthly challenge through the Winter Challenge Series No in-person sports training can be held
February	Monthly challenge through the Winter Challenge Series No in-person sports training can be held
March - May	Decision regarding in-person sports training pending  Spring Partner Up Power Up is launched: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As a fitness opportunity to complement sports training</li><li>• As its own program to reach those athletes who are still unable/uncomfortable with in-person training</li><li>• As a way for schools to fully engage in the Unified Champion Schools program</li><li>• As a way for local athletes to participate in Special Olympics in place of spring games. While there is no substitute for the spring games experience, SONC now has a full Partner Up Power Up plan to still give a quality experience to the athletes and to prepare them for a great spring games season in 2022.</li></ul>