



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

All guidelines in this document are in effect until December 31, 2021 realizing that they may be updated at any time due to changing circumstances.

The practice SONC has had in place for some time with regards to using counties being identified with high COVID transmission to determine activity has increasingly not lined up with activity across the state in other settings. While Special Olympics has remained more conservative in opening up events due to many athletes falling into a high-risk category, there is more latitude and many other factors with the current pandemic situation versus the fall of 2020.

Considering the updated guidance from Special Olympics, Inc. along with participant feedback, **Special Olympics North Carolina (SONC) will allow in-person sports training and competition to resume on Friday, September 17, 2021.**

Guidelines for any activities:

All in-person gatherings should abide by the following:

- Everyone involved is comfortable with in-person training. Any participant can opt out at any time.
- All are expected to follow parameters laid out by the state of North Carolina, local entities and relevant facilities.
- The local program should have Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available for all participants (masks, hand sanitizer, etc.)
- A [communicable disease acknowledgment and waiver form](#) must be completed by every person attending the in-person gathering. This only has to be completed once.
- Athlete Participation Packets (medicals) must be up-to-date for any athlete participating in any in-person activity outside the school environment. Updated forms must be on file before participation.
- Masks are to be worn at all times other than during vigorous activity/competition.
- Indoor activities can be held but this must be limited to 50 people or less; 50 is counting everyone that SONC brings into the facility including, athletes, coaches, volunteers, spectators.
- There is no limit on the size of outdoor activities, but all are encouraged to still focus on smaller-scale activities (approximately 200 people or under).

Return to Activities Protocol

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- Guidance for transportation arrangements will be provided.
- All of the usual safety recommendations will be encouraged (handwashing, social distancing where possible, no sharing of equipment, etc.).
- Vaccinations are not required to participate in SONC activities but they are encouraged.
- We have the full go-ahead for non-contact sports. For contact sports, the primary Winter contact sport being basketball, practice must be done in drill fashion rather than team play. We will still rely on the COVID transmission rate to determine when contact sports can fully resume. The sports department will work with coaches on this.
- There is no longer any requirement to conduct the on-site screening process.
- **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. Only if students travel to a multi-school event would this be considered an SONC event and fall under all of our requirements including the need for a current Athlete Participation Packet.**

Fitness Training from Home

SONC will continue to make training programs available for athletes and Unified partners. Partner Up Power Up will be in place to occur either as a standalone fitness program or a complement to sport training.

Competition Events

Local-level

Local programs may continue planning for fall events with constant and clear communication with all involved.

Competitions should not be held if athletes do not get at least four weeks of sport training. SONC recommends, instead, that sport showcases take place so athletes still have the opportunity to participate in a sport. Divisioning and awarding of places would simply not happen at those showcase events but rather recognition of participation would be given.

Many local events are school-based. All local leadership should be in regular contact with the local school system to understand their policies around use of facilities, field trips, etc. which may impact those events. In most cases, we anticipate that those local school-based events will not happen in the fall. Additionally, discussions around the feasibility of spring games should already occur with the acknowledgement that Partner Up Power Up may once again need to be the focus in the spring of 2022 in lieu of a local games.

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State-level

SONC will not hold any state-level events in the calendar year of 2021. Planning has begun for state-level events in 2022. Conditions will, however, be monitored closely to ensure that we can resume events involving overnight stays at that time.

Coach Training Schools

SONC will continue to hold coach sport training schools in a virtual setting and Coaching Special Olympics Athletes. Additional trainings, including Protective Behaviors, General Orientation, and sport recertification tests, are already available online and can be accessed via the [SONC Coach and Sport Resources webpage](#).

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.

Healthy Athletes

Healthy Athlete screening events will follow the same guidance as sport training and competition events.

Those looking to hold a MedFest event in the fall should already be in conversations with SONC staff on how to monitor planning and potentially adjust these events (smaller scale, etc.)

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. 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

Most leadership meetings are now most easily done through virtual/online meetings so these are strongly encouraged. Meetings may occur in-person if necessary and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Please consult with your community resource director to determine the best course of action.