



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 **July 31, 2022**, realizing that they may be updated at any time due to changing circumstances.

Currently Special Olympics North Carolina is allowing all in-person activities.

Guidelines for any activities:

All in-person gatherings should abide by the following:

- Everyone involved is comfortable with in-person activity. 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 organizer 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 all athletes, Unified partners, coaches, officials, volunteers, others in attendance of an activity, and families/caregivers if they will not exclusively be in spectator only spaces. This only has to be completed once.
- Masks are optional in all settings, though still recommended indoors.
- There is no capacity limit on events.
- Guidance for transportation arrangements is provided in this document.
- All of the usual safety recommendations are 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 a full go-ahead for all sports. Please continue to follow the general guidelines for mask-wearing as laid out in this document. A sport-by-sport breakdown is available [here](#).
- There is no longer any requirement to conduct the on-site screening process.
- Athlete Participation Packets (medicals) must be up-to-date for any athlete participating in any in-person activity (other than activities happening in a single school). Updated forms must be on file before participation.
- **If any SONC trainings/activities happen in a single school facility 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.**



Transportation Guidance

Special Olympics North Carolina (SONC) recognizes that transportation is a constant challenge under the best of circumstances. As we all try to maintain the safest environment possible for all involved, here are some guidelines to help you make decisions about transportation arrangements.

Feel free to share specific circumstances with your community resources director if you have questions.

Transportation Tips

- We encourage you to only ride with members of your household if you can pull that off.
- If you need to carpool/share a vehicle, everyone is encouraged but not required to wear a mask the entire time while in the vehicle. Always verify that everyone is comfortable with this situation.
- Rental car companies do have a shortage of vehicles, particularly 12-passenger vans, so book early and consider alternatives as much as possible; these include family members carpooling, renting smaller vehicles, and recruiting additional people to drive (they should have a Class A volunteer screening form on file with us), etc.
- There is no specific limit on how many people can ride in a vehicle. A reasonable guideline for larger vehicles such as vans may be 50% capacity. Work with your participants to set a number with which everyone is comfortable.
- You raise good money for your local program and investing in transportation options is perfectly reasonable and necessary!



Event Specifics

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 either as a standalone fitness program or a complement to sport training.

Competition Events

Local-level

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 can 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 the use of facilities, field trips, etc. which may impact those events. Plans for any local spring games should already be in motion; otherwise, spring games should be cancelled for 2022. Partner Up Power Up will once again be provided in addition to spring games or in lieu of a local games for those communities not holding the event.

State-level

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 and Coaching Special Olympics Athletes in a virtual setting. Some in-person options may be offered in the spring. 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 to determine if it will be possible in 2022.

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 spring 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 a valuable 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.