

## A Foreword from the Special Olympics Ireland Medical Advisor

Dear Club,

As we enter this new and optimistic phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, public health measures have significantly eased<sup>1</sup>.

This is very good news for us in Special Olympics Ireland (SOI), and as a nation in general. SOI would however ask you to please remain vigilant. SOI athletes remain a high-risk group as a whole. With restrictions easing at pace, we may lose sight of the very high levels of COVID-19 continuing to circulate in the community. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention still considers Ireland to have ‘Very High’ levels of COVID-19<sup>2</sup>.

From our recent survey, over 90% of SOI athletes and volunteers have received a COVID-19 vaccine. We thank you sincerely for playing your part in protecting each other during this pandemic. The ‘Omicron’ variant of COVID-19 has become dominant and is currently spreading globally. Other variants are likely to come in the future, be more transmissible and cause less severe illness than ‘Omicron’. It is therefore logical and pertinent that we continue to protect ourselves and those we engage with in SOI as we return to activities. The public health benefits of this go beyond COVID-19.

Therefore, we are encouraging all clubs to continue to engage and implement public health guidelines. We also encourage the continuing engagement with public health guidance and SOI recommendations regarding the wearing of facemasks, washing of hands and maintaining a 2m distance between others when possible.

The poet Seamus Heaney wrote, “If we winter this one out, we can summer anywhere”. This spring and summer have never felt so optimistic.

Stay safe,

*Colm Keane*

**Dr. Colm Keane, MD, FCAI**

### References

1. Information C: COVID-19 restrictions in Ireland, 2022
2. Prevention CfDCa: COVID-19 in Ireland, 2022

## Unvaccinated Athletes and Volunteers Participating in SOI

Clubs should afford individuals to take personal responsibility to decide whether or not they are happy to return to club activities. SOI's Medical Advisor – Dr. Colm Keane has provided the following information regarding unvaccinated athletes and volunteers participating with SOI.

*“Special Olympics Ireland (SOI) is an inclusive organisation. All individuals wishing to participate should be allowed to do so. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccination status for COVID-19 may influence a person’s decision to participate in SOI activities or not.*

*People may not be vaccinated against COVID-19 for personal or medical reasons. For those not vaccinated, they are at an increased risk of severe illness and hospitalisation if they contract COVID-19 in the community.*

*Those SOI participants that are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (initial 1-2 vaccinations, plus booster vaccine) are at a significantly reduced risk of severe illness and hospitalisation.*

*They are also less likely to transmit the virus to other people, although this reduction reduces 2-3 months after vaccination.*

*As we deal with the most recent COVID-19 variant ‘Omicron’, SOI encourages that all athletes and volunteers get fully vaccinated against COVID-19, regardless of their intent to return to SOI activities. SOI also encourages the continuing engagement with public health guidance regarding the wearing of facemasks, washing of hands and maintaining a 2m distance between others when possible.”*

*Colm Keane*

*Dr. Colm Keane, MD, FCAI  
Medical Advisor, January 2022*