

CLUB RETURN TO ACTIVITIES REQUIREMENTS & GUIDANCE

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INTRODUCTION

This document has been created to support you and your club and provides information on how we can work together to protect each other while we are living with Covid. SOI have taken into consideration that there will be different phases that will have peaks, high / low case numbers etc.

This document outlines Special Olympics Ireland's (SOI) requirements and guidance on how a safe return to activities may take place and to assist your Club to make informed decisions.

Individuals should decide if they are happy to return to club activities.

Information from SOI's Medical Advisor – Dr. Colm Keane, can be found in the appendices including information regarding unvaccinated athletes and volunteers participating in SOI activities.

REQUIREMENTS

SOI have outlined specific requirements which each club must implement prior to their return to activities. If you need support please contact your Regional Staff Team, contact details can be found here - [Speak to a Staff Member](#)

1. Pre-Return Self Declaration Forms

All volunteers / athletes (or their parents/guardians/carers) need to declare that they / their athlete is symptom free from COVID-19 and complete the Pre-return Self Declaration form prior to returning to club activities.

Forms must be returned to the COVID-19 Lead / Club before the individual's first session.

A template form is available for clubs to download on our website [here](#) or Clubs may wish to use online Google form templates to allow you to make a copy for your club [here](#).

Returning to Activities after COVID-19

Please note an athlete or volunteer must provide the Club with written medical clearance to return to activities from their Doctor if:

- You have had to self-isolate or tested positive for COVID-19 and had Moderate and /or Severe symptoms of Covid -19 only
- If you have tested positive for COVID-19 and had a change in a health condition that requires annual or more frequent assessment and monitoring by a Medical Specialist or your GP or any cardiac condition, any condition in which a constant review of medication is necessary.

New Athletes

New athletes are also required to complete a [temporary registration form](#).

2. Appoint a Covid-19 Lead

All clubs should appoint a COVID-19 Lead who has the responsibility for ensuring the SOI requirements and any club procedures are implemented. The COVID-19 Lead should be supported by the Club Management Team. Details of the Club's roles and responsibilities can be found in the appendices.

It is expected that all key management personnel will ensure every attempt is made to maintain confidentiality when liaising with members regarding their health declarations.

3. Follow Public Health & Government advice

At all times Public Health and Government advice should be followed. Club Management Teams and the COVID-19 Lead should familiarise themselves with this advice.

More information can be found here

- [Public Health Advice - Republic of Ireland](#)
- [Public Health Advice - Northern Ireland](#)

Information on when and how to self-isolate and restrict movement are also available on the Health Services Executive (HSE) in ROI and Department for Health in NI websites:

- [When to self-isolate \(ROI\)](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): self-isolating and close contacts \(NI\)](#)

4. Communication

Prior to any athlete / volunteer's return to club activities; the club must communicate any COVID-19 measures, responsibilities or requirements to all athletes / volunteers.

All individuals must be reminded that they should not attend any club activity if they have any symptoms or feel unwell (or suspect they have been exposed to COVID-19).

5. Orientating Athletes

Coaches should be mindful that some athletes will have been relatively inactive for up to 24 months and the level of fitness is unlikely to be at the level it may have been previously. Sessions will need to be adapted to suit each athlete group and to facilitate a gradual return to fitness and skill level.

6. Confirm Readiness to return to training

All clubs must contact their Regional Office to confirm their readiness to return to club activities - [Speak to a Staff Member](#)

GUIDANCE

Each Club must assess their club activities, to take into account their facilities / venue, their sport(s), numbers in the club and the specific needs and requirements of the athletes / volunteers, when considering whether or not to implement the guidance provided below.

a) Risk Assessment

Clubs should assess the risks related to the particular activity or sport, and what additional measures are needed to reduce this risk. A risk assessment template can be found [here](#).

b) Mask Wearing

SOI strongly recommends:

- Masks are worn indoors when not participating in physical activity and outdoor where 2M distance cannot be maintained
- FFP2 masks to be used for first aid
- We would strongly encourage athletes to wear masks on their way into and out of the venue and when moving within the venue (if they are comfortable doing so). Athletes are not required to wear a mask while taking part in physical exercise.

c) COVID-19 Control Measures

The following measures are strongly recommended by SOI:

- Hand sanitiser stations to be present at training sessions
- Hand hygiene and good respiratory etiquette should be observed
- Attendees should be discouraged from hand shaking / physical greetings.
- Cleaning of all equipment including sports equipment to be undertaken before and after each training session.
- Ensuring that indoor spaces are well ventilated
- Consideration of indoor space densities and duration of indoor activities

d) Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and Supplies

Club will need to source their own PPE which can include Face Masks, Disposable Gloves, Antibacterial Wipes, Disinfectant Spray, Waste bags, Tissues, Plastic Aprons, Cleaning Paper (blue roll) etc.

Appendices

1. A Foreword from the Special Olympics Ireland Medical Advisor
2. Unvaccinated Athletes and Volunteers Participating in SOI
3. Club COVID-19 Roles

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 eased¹.

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-19².

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,



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

CLUB COVID-19 ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The Club Management Team	Club COVID-19 Lead
<p>The Club Management Team shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint a Club COVID-19 Lead • Oversee the planning for the safe return to activities for the club • Support the work of the COVID-19 Lead e.g. with club communications to and from members, procuring of PPE etc. • Ensure every attempt is made to maintain confidentiality when liaising with members regarding their health declarations and club contact logs • Maintain confidentiality of suspected cases - The club must act, in as far as reasonably possible, assure members who might have symptoms that their confidentiality would be protected if they declared the same or become unwell at training. 	<p><i>If appropriate and the person is willing, your Club Safeguarding Officer may be suitable for this role since the key focus will be on the health, safety and wellbeing of club members.</i></p> <p>The COVID-19 Lead shall undertake the following duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Club Management Team to decide what (if any) recommendations from the SOI guidance will be implemented. • Implement any SOI requirements and agreed procedures for club activities • Communicate with members on club procedures and any changes to training and club activities • Procure appropriate PPE and distribute same to coaches for club sessions. • Ensure all attendees have returned their Pre-Return Self Declaration and medical clearance as required. • Communicate the club's return to Special Olympics Ireland.

- The club will notify local Health Authorities of any case of COVID-19 in the manner prescribed by the Health Authority
- Any conflict resolution or disciplinary process required within a club will be dealt with by a limited number of people to ensure confidentiality.

- Address any club member concerns
- Keep in contact with any member who has tested positive for COVID-19 and attain (where required) written confirmation from a medical professional that it is safe to return.