



POTENTIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PARA ATHLETES

REVIEWED JULY 2020

At the IPC, the health and well-being of Para athletes is our top priority and we are working hard to gather as much information as possible on the potential impact of COVID-19 to provide appropriate advice.

Concern has been raised that Para athletes may be at more risk of severe disease from COVID-19, in the same way as has been stated for elderly people and for people with certain underlying health conditions.

However, the Paralympic athlete population is not a homogeneous group. Para athletes are all individuals with very different underlying conditions and health needs, so the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach to COVID-19 is not appropriate or representative of an individual athlete's risk.

Nevertheless, because of the severity of the impairment or any associated immune deficit or chronic condition, some athletes could be more vulnerable. For example, some individuals with cervical spinal cord lesions may have a greater risk of developing respiratory complications in general due to weakness and mobility restriction of the chest wall. Spinal cord injury is also independently associated with other conditions such as diabetes type II and cardiovascular disease, which are known risk factors for increased morbidity due to COVID. Finally, some people with higher spinal cord injuries may have an autonomic disturbance and a suboptimal immune response which might add to the overall risk. However, there are no current studies on the potential impacts of coronavirus on Para athletes. (For further information please see: Assessment of potential Covid-19 disease severity risk based on disability.)

Consultation with the IPC Medical Committee and International Federation medical experts, as well as information provided by the WHO, indicates that there has been no evidence that an athlete with disability in general have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

Many Para athletes are also more experienced than is the general population to following hand hygiene, coughing etiquette and general infection avoidance procedures as part of illness prevention education - this has been a principle of Para athlete education for some time. However, at this time we all should be even more vigilant in this regard.

The IPC will continue to seek advice from the WHO, but ultimately athletes are the best judge of their own body and their medical needs.

Our advice for Para athletes is that they should follow the current medical guidance from the WHO and their national guidelines on prevention and seek advice from medical professionals. We would urge any athlete displaying the symptoms to report to their local medical authorities without delay.