Special Olympics Kansas releases its softball and golf return to play guidelines

Special Olympics Kansas optimistic about getting athletes back on the field following COVID-19 cancellations.

MISSION, Kan. — Special Olympics athletes will take the field again soon with permission to begin practice and competition of softball and golf. The organization has outlined a three-phase set of guidelines, beginning August 1, 2020, that emphasizes the importance of the health and safety of all members of the Special Olympics movement. Athlete, coach and volunteer health is the main priority of Special Olympics Kansas and return to play follows. Dates and locations for state competitions of softball and golf will be announced later.

"Special Olympics Kansas is cautiously optimistic that we will be able to achieve a safe Return to Play for our athletes," stated Special Olympics Kansas President/CEO, John Lair. "Special Olympics training and competition is a key part of our athletes' lives, and it is important that we do our part to attempt to bring some of that normalcy back."

Phase 1 of the plan will begin on August 1 and will allow individual teams to gather in groups of less than 20 to participate in general activities, sports training and/or group fitness. Special Olympics Kansas is encouraging these groups to adhere to proper social distancing guidelines, as both direct and indirect (e.g. through a ball in the hand) contact will not be allowed through this time. All athletes and volunteers must sign a COVID-19 Participant Code of Conduct and Risk Assessment Form before first team practice, and all teams will be keeping an attendance sheet at every gathering in case further contact tracing is needed. As Special Olympics Kansas has made health and safety a priority, proper pre-activity precautions and recommended skills, activities and drills have been outlined and provided to teams.

Phase 2 starts September 7, beginning with an increase in the allowed capacity of gatherings. Teams can now gather in groups of up to 40, and will still be encouraged to practice proper social distancing. Direct contact will still be prohibited, but indirect contact can resume. Phase 2 contains identical guidelines to Phase 1, with the addition of softball teams now being allowed to have inter-program scrimmages while maintaining proper health and safety guidelines.

October 1 begins Phase 3, the final phase in the return to play plan. The gathering limit will increase to 250 people, including the total number of individuals at the competition facility. This phase allows regional tournaments among teams and will include sanitation and social distancing protocols that will be decided on closer to each event. Teams will still be encouraged to practice all of the provided training safety requirements to maintain athlete, coach, volunteer and spectator safety.

All guidance provided by Special Olympics Kansas 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. If a team or program is uncomfortable with in person competition, athletes will have the option to participate in several options of Special Olympics Kansas Virtual Health & Fitness. It is also encouraged that local programs and teams should follow local county policy if local county restrictions are more restrictive than Special Olympics Kansas policy.

Communicate potential cases to the local health authorities for testing and to the SOKS COVID-19 Response Point Person: Chris Burt (burtc@ksso.org / 785-760-3519)
ABOUT SPECIAL OLYMPICS KANSAS
Special Olympics Kansas (SOKS) is dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit, productive and respected members of society through sports competitions, health and nutrition programs and leadership development. SOKS is a non-profit organization supported almost entirely by corporate and individual gifts, and events. The generosity of Kansas organizations, individuals and statewide businesses enable the program to continue. The goal of the Special Olympics is to create a world where every single person is accepted and welcomed. Together, we are helping to make the world a better, healthier, and more joyful place — one athlete, one volunteer, one family member and one plunger at a time.

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