Softball and Golf Return to Play Guidelines

Guiding Principles:

1. The health and safety of all members of the Special Olympics movement is paramount. Athlete and volunteer health are more important than anything else and return to play is second. If we do not feel that our teams are following the protocols outlined below or we do not feel we can safely hold a competition, plans for return to activity will be scaled back.

2. We can’t underestimate the importance of Special Olympics activities for our athlete’s physical and mental health. Keeping in mind guiding principle 1, we are committed to getting athletes together for sports training and competition.

3. While we recommend programs participate in our Fall sports season, local programs not wanting to participate in sports specific training, can participate in health and fitness programming only. SOKS has several options available.

4. HIGH RISK INDIVIDUALS should continue to remain at home. High risk individuals are outlined in the last section of this document and in the COVID-19 Participant Code of Conduct and Risk Assessment Form.

5. Protect yourself and others! These are intended as minimum guidelines.

6. 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.

7. If local county restrictions are more restrictive than SOKS policy, Local Program and teams should follow local county 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)

Updated 7/28/2020
PHASE 1 – AUGUST 1

*Individual teams can gather in small groups (<20 people total individuals) to participate in general activities, sports training and/or group fitness

**Activities Allowed**

- Individual teams can begin practicing while adhering to physical distancing and sanitation protocols. Individuals should be kept at a 6ft distance from one another.
- A handwashing facility or portable station should be available with access to clean water, soap and paper towels to dry hands OR hand sanitizer.
- No direct or indirect contact (e.g. through a ball in the hand) should occur.
- The size restriction does include any coaches or volunteers actively working with athletes.
- The size restriction does not include parents, caregivers and facility staff IF those individuals are maintaining a safe distance from the activity/training and are not having contact with athletes other than the ones they brought to practice.

**Recommended Activities, Skills & Drills**

- Health and safety education – It is recommended that teams first activity be focused entirely on educating athletes on proper sanitation and social distancing in a training and game environment
- Teams should focus on individual softball and golf skills during this phase
- Consider spacing for drills, etc. using visual guides such as tape, chalk, cones, etc.
- Maintain physical distancing and avoid close contact (e.g. high fives, hugs, huddles) during and after activity

**Pre-Activity Precautions**

- All participants (athletes and volunteers) must sign a COVID-19 Participant Code of Conduct and Risk Assessment Form before first team practice.
- Require coaches to take NFHS COVID course prior to first practice.
- Contact tracing – Teams must keep an attendance sheet for each practice/gathering and be prepared to submit that weekly to SOKS upon request and to state/county health officials upon request. Attendance sheet should track all individuals in attendance, not just athletes.
- Coaches should ask questions of athletes upon arrival to determine if they are showing any signs or symptoms of COVID-19
- Regular education must be provided to all athletes, staff, volunteers, coaches, families and caregivers reminding them stay home if they have a fever or any signs and symptoms
- Remind participants to bring PPE and, if used, their own water bottle, towel, and equipment. Have facemasks/PPE available for those who are unable to provide their own.
- Remind athletes to wear appropriate sport clothing for practice to minimize sweat transmission onto equipment and surfaces.
- Provide a safe participation option for those who are at high risk and thus unable to participate in person (virtual training/fitness at home)
- Consider using tape, paint and signage within the bleachers and spectator areas around the facility to mark where spectators can or cannot gather. This should help to minimize the number of people in a given area.
- Consider using artificial noisemakers in place of whistles to minimize droplets

Updated 7/28/2020
Training Safety Requirements

- Athletes are required to wear masks when not on the field of play
- Coaches/volunteers should wear a mask at all times (Family/Caregivers should wear a mask as mandated by state or local policies)
- NO shared supplies such as towels and water/beverage bottles.
- NO direct or indirect contact (e.g. through a ball in the hand) should take place. EXCEPT in cases of emergency where coaches/program volunteers need to assist an athlete.
- Shared equipment should be limited to only those items that sharing is essential (i.e. balls and bats). Bats should be sanitized between uses. Balls should be sanitized frequently during practice.
- Golf alternate shot: Participants should not use shared carts or be grouped with other pairs. Exceptions may be made for individuals living in the same house. Do not remove hole flag.
- Golf skills practice: Social distancing precautions should be considered.
- There should be no shared food nor shared water jugs/beverage dispensers – individual bottles and packages only.
- No direct or indirect contact (e.g. balls, softball bats, golf clubs or other equipment being handed between individuals, tagging a runner out, etc.). Playing catch from an appropriate distance and batting are acceptable.
- It is highly recommended that each athlete have their own bat and helmet to use for practice and games. When athletes must share equipment:
  - Bats - are to be wiped down after each inning. It is permissible for different athletes to use the same bat in an inning, but that bat must be wiped down when the team is in the field.
  - Helmets - if athletes share helmets during an inning, the helmet must be wiped down before being used by the next athlete....batter A strikes out, batter B wants to use the helmet batter A used, that helmet must be wiped down before batter B can enter the batter's box. All helmets must be wiped down between innings.
  - Golf Clubs – are to be wiped down before being used by the next athlete.

Additional Considerations

- Coaches and volunteers should minimize changes in personnel. Groups should stay together and not switch up if possible.
PHASE 2 – SEPTEMBER 7

Size restrictions on number of individuals in one location are increased (≤40 people).

Activities Allowed

- Teams can play inter-program scrimmages to work on game environments. Teams should spend time working on adhering to physical distance and sanitation requirements pre and post practice.
- The size restriction does include any coaches or volunteers actively working with athletes.
- Indirect contact (e.g. through a ball in the hand) MAY resume.
- The size restriction does not include parents/caregivers/facility staff IF those individuals are maintaining a safe distance from the activity/training and are not having contact with athletes other than the ones they brought to practice.

Recommended Activities, Skills & Drills

- Softball teams are encouraged to have inter-program scrimmages. It is recommended that teams gather at a distance prior to practice to review health and safety guidelines

Pre-Activity Precautions

- These will stay consistent with the guidelines provided for Phase 1. Any other additional changes are as follows and should be added onto previous precautions.
- Continue to provide a safe participation option for those who are at high risk and thus unable to participate in person (virtual training/fitness at home)

Training Safety Requirements

- These will stay consistent with the guidelines provided for Phase 1. Any other additional changes are as follows and should be added onto previous precautions.
- Indirect contact (e.g. through a ball in the hand) MAY resume. Modifications to rules may be needed to reduce contact (i.e. separate bases for runner and fielder)
PHASE 3 – OCTOBER 1

Size restrictions on number of individuals in one location are increased (≤250 people).

Activities Allowed

- Regional based softball and golf competitions will take place with TBD physical distancing and sanitation protocols. For softball competitions, games will be spaced out and fewer fields used.
- Because of potential intermixing of parents, fans and athletes in non-competition areas although this should be very limited, the total number of individuals at the competition facility are counted in the size restriction.
- Remind participants that during transport to activities, it is recommended that participants should wear a mask if on public transport, such as a bus, trolley, subway or if carpooling which includes someone not living with them. Applies to Phase 1 and 2 as well.

Pre-Activity Precautions

- These will stay consistent with the guidelines provided for Phase 1. Any other additional changes are as follows and should be added onto previous precautions.
- Continue to provide a safe participation option for those who are at high risk and thus unable to participate in person (virtual training/fitness at home)
- Games Management Team will ensure that all venues are prepared appropriately
- Our on-site screening protocol is to be determined and will be announced closer to each event

Training Safety Requirements

- These will stay consistent with the guidelines provided for Phase 1. Any other additional changes are as follows and should be added onto previous precautions.
- Participants should be served or prepackaged “grab and go” meals in a bag with disposable utensils, napkin, and hand wipe included. Condiments should be in individual packages - not large bottles for group use.
High Risk Assessment Form

Who is at higher risk of COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new disease and information is changing on who is more likely to get COVID-19 and who will have more complications. Based on currently available information and clinical expertise, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities may be at higher risk of severe illness resulting in death from COVID-19.

Current clinical guidance and information from the U.S. CDC lists those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 as:
- People 65 years and older

People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, are also at high risk:
- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- People who have serious heart conditions (including heart failure, coronary artery disease, congenital heart disease, cardiomyopathy)
- People who are immunocompromised
- Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher). To calculate BMI, refer to: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/adult_bmi/english_bmi_calculator/bmi_calculator.html
- People with diabetes
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
- People with liver disease
- People with brain and spinal cord disorders (like cerebral palsy, epilepsy, stroke)

If you are at a high risk, you may be putting yourself at risk when you return to activities with Special Olympics. But, you may also put at risk your family and your teammates. If you have these conditions, you should not return to Special Olympics in person activities until there is little to no COVID-19 in your community.

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, you should consult with a healthcare professional for written medical clearance before returning to Special Olympics in person activities as serious cardiac, respiratory, and neurological issues may develop as a result of COVID-19.