



SPECIAL OLYMPICS CANADA AND SPECIAL OLYMPICS PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND  
**ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPANTS WITH DOWN SYNDROME POLICY**

*This Policy has been prepared by Special Olympics Canada and is a Pan-Canadian Policy applicable to Special Olympics Canada and its Chapters. This document cannot be modified by a Chapter without consultation and approval from Special Olympics Canada.*

**EFFECTIVE DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 2019**

**LAST REVISED: AUGUST 12, 2019**

### Definitions

1. The following terms have these meanings in this Policy:
  - a) “Athlete” – an individual registered as an Athlete with Special Olympics Canada or a Chapter
  - b) “Chapter” – means the Provincial or Territorial Special Olympics organization recognized by Special Olympics Canada as a provincial or territorial governing body of Special Olympics;
  - c) “Organization-sanctioned event or activity” – means any local, regional, provincial or national games, competitions, events, programs, or activities sanctioned by Special Olympics Canada or the Chapter.

### Purpose

2. This Policy describes how an Athlete with Down Syndrome or a Symptomatic Atlantoaxial Instability can participate in Special Olympics.

### Participation by Athletes with Down Syndrome

3. There is evidence from medical research that up to 15% of individuals with Down syndrome have a misalignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and C-2 in the neck, known as atlantoaxial instability. This condition exposes individuals with Down syndrome to possible injury if they participate in activities that hyperextend or radically flex the neck or upper spine.
4. Special Olympics Canada and its Chapters require that all new participants with Down syndrome submit an initial screening indicating if the atlantoaxial instability condition exists prior to starting any sport program. If the condition exists, the Athlete may not participate in the sports listed below in 5 b). Results of this screening must be forwarded to Special Olympics Canada or the Chapter along with the Athlete’s registration form. Subsequent screenings, though recommended, are left to the discretion of the Athlete and his/her parent/guardian or legal representative.
5. Special Olympics Canada and its Chapters will take the following precautions before permitting Athletes with Down syndrome to participate in certain sport activities:



- a) Once screened for atlantoaxial instability, Athletes with Down syndrome may participate in most official Special Olympics sports training and competition but shall not be permitted to participate in any activities, which by their nature, result in hyper-extension, radical flexion, or direct pressure on the neck or upper spine, unless the requirements of subsections (c) and (d) below are satisfied.
- b) Athletes may not participate in sports training and competition activities including: butterfly stroke and diving starts in swimming, diving, pentathlon, high jump, squat lifts, equestrian sports, artistic gymnastics, soccer, alpine skiing, and any warm-up exercise placing undue stress on the head and neck.
- c) An Athlete with Down syndrome may be permitted to participate in the activities described in subsection (b) above if that Athlete is examined (including x-ray views of full extension and flexion of the neck) by a physician who has been briefed on the nature of the atlantoaxial instability condition, and who determines based on the results of that examination, that the Athlete does not have an atlantoaxial instability condition: or
- d) An Athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed by a physician as having atlantoaxial instability condition may nevertheless be permitted to participate in the activities described in subsection (b) above if the Athlete, or the parent or guardian of a minor Athlete, confirms in writing his or her decision to proceed with these activities notwithstanding the risks created by the atlantoaxial instability, and one (1) Licensed Medical Professional certifies in writing that they have explained these risks to the Athlete and his/her parent or guardian, and that the at Athlete's condition does not, in their judgment, preclude the Athlete from participation in Special Olympics training and competition. These statements and certifications shall be documented by the Special Olympics Canada and the Chapter.

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