



To: Local Coordinators and Local Committee members

Date: September 5, 2020

Topic: Return to Sport update

We are on the cusp of another step in the Special Olympics BC Return to Sport Plan, and would like to take a moment to thank and celebrate all the athletes, coaches, and volunteers who have worked so hard to help reach this point. This includes all the pilot program participants, who put so much thought and care into their programs in order to make sure we have the best possible safety protocols in place. And this includes all of you who are working so hard right now on your plans to reopen the four sports currently at Level 1. Please know that your efforts mean a great deal to a great many people.

Today we can share that **figure skating, speed skating, and swimming are entering the Pilot Program phase**. Several Locals around the province have stepped up to run pilot programs in these sports as soon as their local facilities allow. We are so thankful to the coaches, athletes, and volunteers who are making these important pilots possible. Their feedback and dedication are essential, as they are making sure the appropriate protocols are in place to safely reopen these sports.

To date, more than 100 coaches and volunteers in our current Level 1 sports (athletics, bocce, golf, and Club Fit) have completed the required SOBC Return to Sport training. Huge thanks to these coaches and volunteers for their commitment, and to all of you who have participated in training and are spreading the word about the webinars. Please check the [SOBC Return to Sport website](#) for details on upcoming events.

These have been challenging times for every member of our society. The fact that we are able to reopen any in-person opportunities at all is a cause for celebration. We want to thank you for making this possible!

We want to thank you for your diligence in following all the safety guidelines and protocols. As we all know, we can't let our guard down and take shortcuts. As we are all experiencing throughout these circumstances, it is important to continue reviewing the guidelines and protocols from time to time, both to stay on top of emerging changes and to ensure we are always following best practices and running programs as safely as possible.

We know there are not yet as many in-person opportunities as athletes need – not nearly enough. But some, safely, is better than none. And work on the remaining sports and programs continues. Even if it doesn't always feel like it, we can promise you that the necessary work behind the scenes is always in motion around the province. The safe return to sport is our absolute priority.

Safety has layers of meaning. We all know that we must have all possible physical safety protocols in place for any in-person interactions to resume. But we also know that athletes are suffering from the isolation they're experiencing in the wake of the SOBC program pause. They are experiencing significant impacts



on their physical, mental, and emotional health. So their safety is at risk from these factors too. We really want to thank you for all the work you're doing to make sure we address this.

We realize it is so much more complicated right now to run programs. We realize there are a lot of individual circumstances in individual communities. If you are experiencing hurdles, please do talk with the Community Development Coordinator for your Region, so that together we can work out how provincial office staff can help smooth your path and return to sport where possible.

We also encourage you to talk with your coaches about their comfort levels. If they are interested in returning to sports but there are other issues, SOBC staff are here to help work through those other issues. Coach feedback on the entire picture is so important right now; we are hearing a lot of it and getting so much value from it.

Once you have consulted coaches and athletes, and made your Local Committee's decisions, please talk to your Community Development Coordinator before you communicate major return to sport decisions to your community. We are here to help with language that can provide the most positive possible framing and support.

We realize the Earth keeps turning and shortening the days, and rainy season will be coming as always. We are aware the current outdoor sports may not be able to run as long as anyone would like. But something is better than nothing. And we hope you know that we are here to help you make that possible. In the meantime, we remain hard at work on the safety protocols for additional sports. We are putting in all of this work at the provincial level so that Locals don't have to, when there is so much else on your plates.

To recap SOBC's current Return to Sport status, as you know:

- Athletics, bocce, golf, and outdoor Club Fit are at Level 1, available to be offered by Locals around the province, once they receive approval from SOBC.
- Figure skating, speed skating, and swimming are entering the Pilot Program phase.

Locals have also done an amazing job since March of offering virtual opportunities where possible. Thank you for all you have been doing! Upcoming virtual options include, but are not limited to:

- Coaches will have access to multi-week SOBC virtual program outlines to lead sport-specific training through virtual connections. More will be announced next week, with information to be shared in the [SOBC Return to Sport Coach and Volunteer Town Halls](#) on September 8 and 10.
- Coaches can connect with athletes virtually to offer support of at-home training using the [SOBC Basic Sport Skills](#) tools, which focus on developing the fundamental skills for each SOBC sport. There are PDF packages online for every sport, and several videos to help athletes with at-home skill training; videos in additional sports will be released in the coming weeks.



- Locals can continue to offer the [Virtual Fit Families & Friends](#) program. Fit Families & Friends has typically been a summer program, to offer activity options during the summer program hiatus – but as we all know, there’s nothing typical about the current circumstances, so Locals are welcome to keep offering this virtual program as an additional opportunity for physical activity and virtual connections.
- Volunteers and coaches can connect with athletes to encourage participation in the [SOBC Super September calendar](#) of daily at-home workouts and wellness activities.

As a communications resource to help promote your return to sport, we have created a template media release and media protocols. To receive these resources or share any feedback and/or questions, please don’t hesitate to contact SOBC Communications Manager Megan Pollock on cell at 604-737-3077 or email [megan@specialolympics.bc.ca](mailto:megan@specialolympics.bc.ca).

Additional fundraising Return to Sport resources will also be available and distributed soon.

Please continue to check the SOBC website for opportunities and Return to Sport Plan updates and resources. <https://www.specialolympics.ca/british-columbia/return-sport>

Please continue to share your thoughts on what you need and recommend throughout this slow, phased process. Your insights are truly invaluable.

And please always know that we are so grateful to you for the significant difference you make in the lives of so many people who care so much about the opportunities they have through Special Olympics.

Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me or any SOBC staff member with any questions and feedback.

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