

18 March 2020

Coronavirus Outbreak

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- fever,
- tiredness, and
- dry cough.

Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually.

Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing.

Older people and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus spreads from an infected person to others through:

- The air by coughing and sneezing.
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 have mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Most people with COVID-19 will have a mild illness, but some people will get sicker and may need to be hospitalized. If you are 60 years or older, are pregnant, or are chronically ill (have lung, heart or kidney disease), contact your physician's office so that they can monitor your health more closely or test you for COVID-19.

What are severe complications from this virus?

Some people have gotten pneumonia in both lungs, some have gotten hospitalized and a small number have died from COVID-19.

People who are older (over 60), are pregnant or are chronically ill (have lung, heart or kidney disease) are at higher risk of those complications.

How can I help protect myself?

Here is a [video](#) and simple everyday actions to help prevent the spread of coronavirus:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. This generally means staying two meters away.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

Should I wear a mask when I go out in public?

Health authorities do not recommend that people who are healthy wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.

Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of face masks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone at home or in a health care facility.

If you have a fever, cough or shortness of breath, and you suspect you might have been exposed to COVID-19, you should:

If you develop symptoms within 14 days of last contact with a confirmed case or of returning to Australia, you should seek medical attention.

Your doctor will tell you if you need to get tested.

What should I do if I have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 but I am not sick?

You should monitor your health for fever, cough and shortness of breath for 14 days from your last close contact with the person who has COVID-19. You should not go to work or school, and should avoid public places for 14 days.

Is there a treatment?

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 that will cure the virus. People with COVID-19 can seek medical care to help relieve symptoms.

Should I still attend Special Olympics events or practice?

If you are feeling sick (have or recently had a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing), you should definitely stay home to protect yourself and others. If you have existing breathing conditions, you may also choose to stay home to reduce your risk. At this time, Special Olympics is taking all precautions to protect our athletes and participants as it relates to COVID-19 as best as possible.

Special Olympics Australia recommends members and clubs postpone all existing training, competitions and other events until further notice

Are individuals with intellectual disabilities at increased risk for COVID-19?

Individuals with intellectual disabilities who have existing medical conditions, including breathing problems, are at increased risk for COVID-19.

What should I do if I have been to a Special Olympics event recently?

As with any other public gathering, monitor your health for symptoms. If you feel sick, follow the instructions above.

For additional information, follow the guidance of your local and national health authorities: public health departments, Department of Health and the [World Health Organization](#).

Maintaining Physical Fitness

How can I maintain my physical fitness?

Developing physical fitness is an important part of life. We recommend that you speak with your coach to find ways to continue training and living a healthy lifestyle. There are many practical ways in which you can work half an hour of physical activity into your day such as:

- walking around the neighbourhood,
- taking the stairs instead of the elevator, and
- getting the whole family active together.

Certain exercises can help you improve the skills needed for your sport. You can find a Special Olympics guide to achieving fitness and your personal best with physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. [Open Special Olympics Fit 5 Guide.](#)

You can also read more hints and tips on physical activity in Sport Australia's Find Your 30. [Open Find Your 30.](#)

Staying indoors and the cancellation of training sessions doesn't mean you neglect your fitness.

Have you downloaded Sprout? Together with Microsoft and partners, and in consultation with Special Olympics athletes, we've created a home-based inclusive fitness App to help you keep fit anytime, every day.

The game has features like animated exercise videos and progress bars where each level contains exercises for strength, endurance, balance and flexibility.

Sprout is based on our FIT5 framework which provides a safe, tested and gradual way for you to stay fit with tips on physical activity, nutrition and hydration.

Three quick tips include:

1. Exercise 5 days a week
2. Eat 5 total fruits & vegetables per day
3. Drink 5 bottles of water per day

[Download Sprout for iPhones](#)

[Download Sprout for Android](#)

Recommendation from Special Olympics Australia (SOA)

At their two-day strategic planning session last week, the National Board of Special Olympics Australia strongly repeated their earlier recommendation that our **members and clubs postpone all existing training, competitions and other events until further notice**. This recommendation remains unchanged.

These actions are necessary to ensure that we are doing everything we can to prevent transmission of the virus.

We are monitoring this constantly and as things change, we will adjust accordingly. This decision will be reviewed regularly, and we will keep you all up to date.

Why was this decision made?

This cautious and protective decision has been made to ensure the safety of our vulnerable athletes and entire community. People with intellectual disabilities frequently have health issues that may make them more likely to develop serious illness if they contract coronavirus.

Will my sport or club still have weekly training?

We recommend that clubs postpone all existing training, competitions and other events until further notice.

What will happen to selection events?

Selection events will be impacted for the duration of this recommendation; however, the competition pathway remains unchanged. We expect that later in the year when the risk has subsided, State Committees will nominate other events as selection events in order to give athletes selection opportunities.

How will this impact 2020 Junior National Games?

Planning for the scheduled 2020 Junior National Games in October at Launceston will continue in the expectation that the Games will proceed as planned. Teams and athletes attending the Junior National Games should continue with their administrative plans for the Games to proceed but exclude training, competitions and other events.

When will this decision be reviewed?

Coronavirus is a rapidly evolving issue. We will continue to review the situation and always ensure we have our athletes and their health at the centre of any decision.

Has anyone from our Special Olympics Australia community contracted coronavirus?

Not that we're aware of. This is a preventative, proactive recommendation. The first case of COVID-19 in an athlete in the United States was reported on 7 March 2020. At Special Olympics, we are doing everything we can to provide information and assist in preventing COVID-19. You can find the current global count of cases of COVID-19 on the website of the [World Health Organization](#).

Recommendation from Special Olympics Inc. (SOI)

Advice from Special Olympics International

We have received notification from SOI which states, “**SOI is strongly advising all Regions, Programs, and SOI to cancel all in-person events through 31 May 2020**, at which point we will reassess the situation and provide updated guidance”.

This recommendation from SOI is in line with our recommendation made on Friday 6 March 2020 and I urge you and your Special Olympics Club to follow this advice to protect yourselves and others around you.