

## The IPC's weekly update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - 16/04/2020

*The purpose of this update is to keep everyone within the Paralympic Movement informed of the latest developments with the COVID-19 pandemic and how it relates to the Paralympic Games and Para sport.*

This week in the newsletter we hear from the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Governing Board Member Dr. Debra Alexander, a former Head of the Clinical Psychology Department at Tygerberg Hospital and the Stellenbosch University, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences. Debra runs a private clinical psychology and neuropsychology practice in her native South Africa. She is the Programme Co-ordinator of the MPhil Mindfulness degree in the Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University. Mindfulness is a process of intentionally bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment without judgment.

Debra has prepared a series of articles about navigating the COVID-19 challenges in a mindful way. Whether you are an athlete or an administrator, a support staff member or a volunteer, Debra hopes these will be of benefit to you and others in the Paralympic Movement.

We will run this series over the next three weeks. In the first instalment below, Debra explores the concepts of acceptance and 'control' of the COVID-19 situation. She also outlines how the natural act of breathing can become a simple yet powerful anchor during stormy times and offers some practical guidance in this regard.

We want to continue to use the IPC's digital channels to promote and increase awareness of all the positive work that is taking place in the Paralympic Movement right now. If you would like to let us know about your story or raise awareness of any other initiative, then please get in contact at [media@paralympic.org](mailto:media@paralympic.org)

This week's update contains the following information:

- Getting our heads around the COVID-19, by Dr. Debra Alexander, IPC Board Governing Member
- Tokyo 2020 updates, including an update on Universality Wild Cards
- World Health Organisation (WHO) updates, including new guidance on 'Considerations for sports federations/sports event

organisers when planning mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19'

- Latest media statements from the IPC - 'Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes'

### Getting our heads around the COVID-19, by Dr. Debra Alexander, IPC Board Governing Member

As the reality of COVID-19 and what it means to us in our everyday lives has become clearer, two choices have emerged for us as individuals.

There is option one, where we allow it to get us down by choosing to get angry, frustrated and depressed. This is the negative option.

The positive alternative is option two - we accept the situation for what it is.

In assessing these options, we need to keep in mind that what we think (our thoughts) influences what we feel (emotions) and how we behave in the world.

If we choose option one, our negative thoughts will transition into negative feelings and negative behaviour - these fuel each other taking us on a downward spiral. For example, if we think that we can't cope, we start feeling helpless, our confidence goes out the window and we make mistakes. However, if we choose option two, we can initiate an upward spiral.

Option two speaks to acceptance of the situation. Acceptance does not mean giving up, becoming detached or simply not caring. Acceptance means being attached, taking hold of something no matter how difficult and embracing the true, deep understanding of how things really are.

In Mindfulness practice, we see acceptance as a pause, a period of allowing things to be just as they are, a period of seeing clearly and of turning towards the difficulty rather than trying to avoid it.

When we pause and acknowledge and accept our negative thoughts, feelings and sensations, it breaks the initial link in the chain that leads to negative downward spiral and prevents the mind's automatic aversion pathway from kicking in.

Therefore, when we pause, we give ourselves more time and space to respond in the wisest and most creative way to difficult situations.

If we choose to accept the situation as it is, we open ourselves up to new possibilities, which could include the view that this crisis too shall pass.

Imagine you are a surfer, no wave is ever the same, sometimes the conditions are rough and sometimes calm, sometimes the waves are small and sometimes enormous. This is much the same in life, we never know what challenges we will face and often circumstances are out of our control. As in life and in surfing, we can't control the waves, but we can learn to ride them. So rather than fear the wave, we can harness the power and energy of this force. How we ride this COVID-19 wave is up to each one of us.

In the same way, in which we can harness the power of the wave, we can harness the power of the breath. It is not so much about controlling the breath, as it is about bringing an awareness to the breath, because ultimately the breath happens without any intervention from ourselves ('it breathes itself' - that's what lungs do). In the same way that our lungs breathe, our minds think - it just happens.

Bringing awareness to the breath has some advantages. One of the good things about drawing our attention to the breath is that it reminds us that if we are still breathing there is more right with us than wrong, so we have a great deal to be thankful for. We can either embrace this blessing and make the most of every moment in our lives, or we can choose to be alive and miserable and make everyone around us miserable too.

The second thing about bringing awareness to the breath is that we can use it as an anchor to steady ourselves when things feel just that little bit out of our control. Just as we can learn to ride the waves, we can learn to be mindful - a good starting point is the breath.

Because the breath happens on its' own accord, I am not for one minute suggesting you interfere with this process. I would, however, like to invite you to become acquainted with the wonders of your breath, this life given force that we take for granted.

Identify a quiet place in your home, a place where you feel most safe, comfortable and where you will not be disturbed. Find an area where you can either sit upright on a chair or on the floor or you can lie down. Take a moment to settle and ground yourself, you can close your eyes or lower your gaze if you wish and just for a moment bring your awareness to your whole body, starting with your toes and moving up towards your head, shifting your attention from one area to the next, noticing any and all sensations that are present in the here and now - no need to adjust anything, simply

just notice. When you are ready, move the focus of your attention to the breath, simply noticing the inbreath and the outbreath – just notice! There is no need to adjust or change in any way, the way you breathe – simply notice the inbreath and the outbreath. Do this for a few minutes.

You will notice that after a while your mind starts to wander, you get distracted by thoughts. It's ok, it's just thoughts and it is what the mind does – just like the lungs breathe, the mind thinks and there is no need to beat yourself up about this. Thoughts are just thoughts, we can't halt thinking but we can remind ourselves that thoughts are not our reality, we make them our reality – remember the word, choice. We can choose to get caught up in the content of our thoughts or we can choose to notice that they are a little crazy and make the choice to shift our attention.

So, when you become aware that the focus of your attention has shifted to your thoughts, notice where it has gone and gently escort your attention back to your breath. Each time you get distracted by a sea of thoughts, gently escort your attention back to the breath. Try doing this for at least five minutes on your own.

Good luck – remember to harness the power of the breath by making the breath your anchor during these challenging times!

### **Tokyo 2020 updates**

The 11 April marked 500 days to go until Tokyo 2020 and on 16 April, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee agreed on a framework that will govern preparations for the postponed Games, covering governance, principles and timeline. Full details can be found [here](https://www.paralympic.org/news/tokyo-2020-framework-create-guide-preparations-postponed-games). (<https://www.paralympic.org/news/tokyo-2020-framework-create-guide-preparations-postponed-games>)

This week the Nippon Festival was officially cancelled. Due to take place this summer, the Festival was the official cultural programme of the Tokyo 2020 Games. Inclusivity was one of the four key elements of the Festival, with a proposed theme of 'Towards the realisation of an inclusive society' taking place in August ahead of the Paralympic Games. Rearrangement of the Festival is under consideration.

Universality Wild Cards update

Due to the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, a new period will be established in 2021 for National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) to apply for Universality Wild Cards (UWC).

By the previous deadline of 13 April 2020, the IPC had received applications for a small number of athletes. These applications will be kept on file. We will contact the respective NPCs in early 2021 in order to validate their original applications. Additional UWC applications will then be accepted from eligible NPCs in March/April 2021, with exact dates to be determined.

#### Classification update

The IPC is considering the impact of the Games postponement in order to develop a set of recommendations for its membership in relation to the rescheduled Games classification activities. While many things remain unknown, the IPC is considering the range of solutions that might apply, dependant on when competition and classification opportunities recommence. The IPC will share some guiding principles and recommendations for the membership to consider in the coming weeks.

#### Para sport event cancellations

The list of cancelled Para sport events remains on the IPC website and is being regularly updated. You can find details [here](#).

#### **World Health Organisation update**

According to WHO's latest Daily Situation Dashboard on 15 April 2020 02:00 CEST, the number of confirmed worldwide cases has risen to almost two million. John Hopkins University of Medicine is reporting that over 522,000 people have fully recovered.

Although the pandemic remains Eurocentric - recording nearly half of all cases - the United States of America remains the world's most heavily impacted country in terms of cases and deaths. Much of the world remains in lockdown, although a growing number of countries are easing restrictions. These remain limited, often at one measure per time, and are highly specific to each country.

Key concerns of WHO are that the downward curve is not as steep as that recorded in China and that there are many factors they still do not understand about COVID-19.

They have empathy for athletes and the fact that they have never been in this position before in terms of not being able to train for such a long period of time. It has been observed that one of the biggest longer-term risks to athletes could be injury returning to competition, so strength and condition and simulated competition will play an important role when competitive sport does eventually return. WHO also advise there is no clear exit strategy yet, especially for team sports where players are in close proximity. Many restrictions may last until a vaccine is widely available.

On the latter, they do report positive news. More than 90 countries have joined or have expressed interest in joining the Solidarity Trial, and more than 900 patients have now been enrolled, to evaluate the safety and efficacy of four drugs and drug combinations. Three vaccines have already started clinical trials, more than 70 others are in development.

The IPC continues to use the WHO and their [site](#) as its main source of information regarding the COVID-19. It provides regular situation reports and have a wide range of guidance on health and protection, travel advice, as well as extensive myth-busting and technical guidance sections.

#### Advice on Mass Gatherings

As of 14 April, the WHO has updated its advice on Mass Gatherings and there is a comprehensive Q&A [here](#).

A new [addendum](#) has been developed to provide additional support to sports event organisers in assessing the specific additional risks, identifying mitigation activities and making an informed evidence-based decision on continuing to host any sporting event. Additional guidance is provided in the specific WHO COVID-19 mass gatherings sports addendum risk assessment tool and mitigation checklist. They can be found on this [page](#) underneath the heading 'Mass gatherings COVID-19 risk assessment'.

Another useful section of note is the WHO Information Network. Found [here](#), it has guidance tailored for specific audiences e.g. employers and workers, the health sector, and large event organisers. In this latter area, there is an online course for public health preparedness for mass gathering events.

WHO's WhatsApp messaging service is providing the latest news and information on coronavirus in seven languages: Arabic, English, French, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

Arabic

Send "مرحبا" to +41 22 501 70 23 on WhatsApp

[wa.me/41225017023?text=مرحبا](https://wa.me/41225017023?text=مرحبا)

#### English

Send "hi" to +41 79 893 18 92 on WhatsApp [wa.me/41798931892?text=hi](https://wa.me/41798931892?text=hi)

#### French

Send "salut" to +41 22 501 72 98 on WhatsApp

[wa.me/41225017298?text=salut](https://wa.me/41225017298?text=salut)

#### Hindi

Send "नमस्ते" to +41 22 501 73 41 on WhatsApp

<https://wa.me/41225017341?text=नमस्ते>

#### Italian

Send "ciao" to +41 22 501 78 34 on WhatsApp

<https://wa.me/41225017834?text=ciao>

#### Spanish

Send "hola" to +41 22 501 76 90 on WhatsApp

[wa.me/41225017690?text=hola](https://wa.me/41225017690?text=hola)

#### Portuguese

Send "oi" to +41 22 501 77 35 on WhatsApp

<https://wa.me/41225017735?text=oi>

### Latest IPC media statements

#### Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes (drafted 18 March)

At the IPC the health and well-being of Para athletes is our top priority and we are working hard to gather as much information as possible on the potential impact of COVID-19 to provide appropriate advice.

Concern has been raised that Para athletes may be at more risk of severe disease from COVID-19, in the same way as has been stated for elderly people and for people with certain underlying health conditions.

However, the Paralympic athlete population is not a homogeneous group. Para athletes are all individuals with very different underlying conditions

and health needs, so the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach to COVID-19 is not appropriate or representative of an individual athlete's risk.

Nevertheless, because of the severity of the impairment or any associated immune deficit or chronic condition, some athletes could be more vulnerable. There are no current studies on the potential impacts of coronavirus on Para athletes. The honest answer is that we don't know because this is a new strain of coronavirus and there are very little data available.

Consultation with the IPC Medical Committee and International Federation medical experts, as well as information provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), indicates that there has been no evidence that an athlete with disability in general have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

Para athletes are also more experienced than is the general population to following hand hygiene, coughing etiquette and general infection avoidance procedures as part of illness prevention education - this has been a principle of Para athlete education for some time. However, at this time we all should be even more vigilant in this regard.

The IPC will continue to seek advice from the WHO, but ultimately athletes are the best judge of their own body and their medical needs.

Our advice for Para athletes is that they should follow the current medical guidance from the WHO and their national guidelines on prevention and seek advice from medical professionals. We would urge any athlete displaying the symptoms to report to their local medical authorities without delay.

#### Important website links

- [World Health Organisation](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)