

The IPC's weekly update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - 07/05/2020

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 we open the newsletter with a thought-provoking piece by IPC Governing Board Member Juan Pablo Salazar.

A passionate global activist for the rights of persons with disabilities, Salazar has served as President of the National Council on Disability, and Director of the Presidential Plan for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Presidency of Colombia.

Salazar is also the founder of the first wheelchair rugby club in Colombia. He has also served as Chef de Mission of the Colombian Delegation for the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Paralympic Games, President of the Colombian Sports Federation for People with Physical Disabilities and President of the Colombian Paralympic Committee.

In his article, Salazar examines whether the world is doing enough to protect those with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis. Starting with a reference from 14th century Italian literature, when the world at that time was interrupted by a global plague, Salazar first looks at what are the risks of COVID-19 to those with disabilities. He cites health, poor communication and economic impact as the biggest challenges.

Salazar is also hopeful, through the work of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and initiatives in individual countries, governments are able to respond to extraordinary circumstances; like how Peru swiftly developed creative solutions that benefited persons with disabilities

We 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.

Our social media channels are proving popular and this week on our Instagram feed (click [here](#)) we have:

- Had a unique champions Instagram Live chat between Paralympian Megan Blunk and Olympian Angel McCoughtry, both US gold medallists in basketball at Rio 2016.

- Conducted another fascinating Instagram Live chat between three-time Paralympic medallist guide runner Jerome Avery from the USA and British Para cyclist Sammi Kinghorn. This is part of an Ottobock series where athletes are passing the 'chat baton' on. So, this Sunday Avery is speaking to USA long jumper Lacey Henderson.
- Tried our hand at athlete social distancing bingo.
- Showed the breakfast regime of Serbian Para judo player Dejana Backo.
- Found out who is the most popular mascot in Paralympic Games history.
- Replayed the top five rowing and powerlifting moments from the Paralympic Games as part of ongoing Sport Week promotion.

Since mid-February our channels have been running Sport Week, previewing every Paralympic Games sport from Archery to Wheelchair Tennis in alphabetical order. This week we feature Para rowing along with a couple of COVID-19 related stories:

- Italian Para rower Greta Muti was training in Milan when COVID-19 hit Italy hard. A medical student, she returned to her family home on a small island off the Tuscan coast and with her mother and sister (also doctors) has been conducting a screening exercise of the disease. Like many Italians, she has been keeping her spirits up by singing with [friends](#).
- British Para rower James Fox has been in close contact with his mixed coxed four crew by doing virtual challenges, such as cycling up Mount Everest. Away from the exercise, he has found a new passion for [baking](#).

We really want to use this mail to highlight initiatives by the National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) and International Federations (IFs) and also show the work that they are doing to restart sport. 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

This week's update contains the following information:

- What we need to write in the history books about people with disabilities in a pandemic, by Juan Pablo Salazar, IPC Board Governing Member
- IPC updates

- World Health Organisation update
- Latest media statements from the IPC – ‘Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes’

What we need to write in the history books about people with disabilities in a pandemic, by Juan Pablo Salazar, IPC Board Governing Member

Looking for stuff to do during the quarantine, I played the *Decameron* audiobook. It is a literature from nearly 700 years ago. Written by Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio, it contains 100 tales told by a group of seven young women and three young men sheltering in a secluded villa just outside Florence, Italy, to escape the Black Death.

At a time when people are sheltering from a new disease, I wanted to see if history was repeating itself. I thought and hoped I could find something on how people with disabilities were dealt with during the 14th century.

I found it fascinating. It's as if not a day had gone by since that March in 1348. Like today, the leading actor in the western world was Italy. In the *Decameron*, it was also rumoured that the virus was some kind of curse that came from 'the East'. This is an extract:

"...it was sent upon mortals by the just wrath of God for our correction that had begun some years before in the eastern parts depriving them of a great number of the living, and continuing without rest from one place to another, had spread miserably to the West"

Just like today, back then it wasn't clear how to fight the virus, and within the chaos, desperate policies were put in place. Fascinatingly, social distancing was encouraged, and the many insufficiencies of the health system were revealed. Again, here's what was being written nearly 700 years ago.

"...And not availing against it any knowledge or human providence (such as the cleaning of the city of the city filth ordered by those in charge of it and the prohibition to enter it to all the sick and the many advice given to preserve healthiness) [...], Almost the beginning of the spring of the year before, it began horribly and in an amazing way to show its painful effects."

What are the risks of COVID-19 to those with disabilities?

This text could have been written at the beginning of this Spring, and it would have been equally precise and relevant. However, I couldn't find much about people with disabilities during that time, except that the plague itself was disabling. By contrast, in today's crisis the topic of disease and its impact on disability is very much present and very real.

While it is encouraging to note that there is no evidence that young and healthy Paralympic athletes have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19, something that has been seen all around the world is that people with disabilities, in general, have a higher risk of mortality, morbidity and poverty as a consequence of the disease.

Although not necessarily suffering from health problems, people with disabilities do tend to have higher health needs and are older. Two phenomena that translate into more health complications.

Second, information is not always accessible and that affects the decision-making process of people with disabilities. In Wuhan, for instance, no information on the quarantine was transmitted with sign language interpretation. As a result, many deaf people went out the next day to continue about their lives as usual.

Too few global leaders are including sign language interpretation when they address the public. Two weeks ago, in the United Kingdom deaf campaigners started legal proceedings against the government over a lack of sign language interpreters at its daily COVID-19 briefings. Thankfully regional leaders seem to be one step ahead. The mayor of Bogota in Colombia, for example, has been moving around with a personal sign language interpreter, present even when she addresses the public from her couch at home.

Additionally, measures of forced isolation defy the independence – and in many cases, the lives – of people with disabilities, as they depend on personal assistance. What would happen if the people who assist persons with disabilities to cook and shower, among other things, cannot perform their jobs?

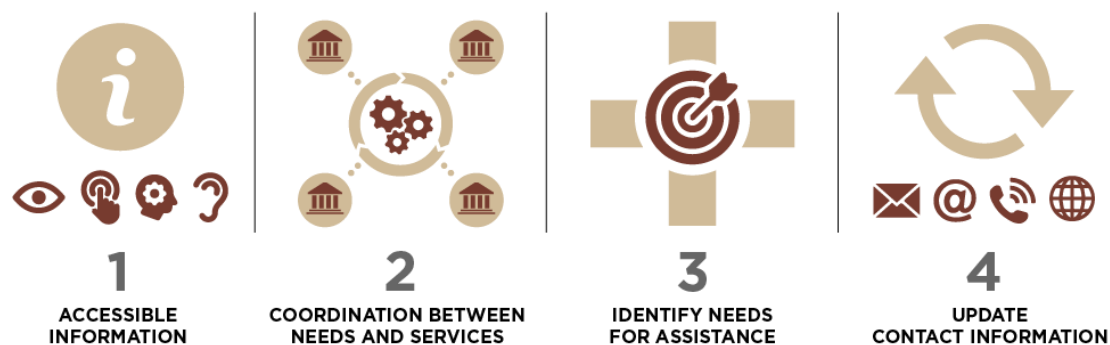
Economic resilience is also a challenge for people with disabilities during the crisis, as they are over-represented in poverty.

So, it's clear the risks are multiple for those with disabilities at this time in history.

What can be done?

Luckily, it's not all bad news. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities gives a mandate to governments to guarantee safety in risky situations.

The countries that are following this mandate included four strategies in their emergency plans to mitigate risks: (i) give information in accessible formats, (ii) understand the needs that local authorities have in order to provide services for persons with disabilities, (iii) identify the assistance needs of people with disabilities, and (iv) keep contact information updated.



My home region of Latin America has shown it is highly capable to respond to extraordinary circumstances. Extraordinary solutions have been created by very capable technicians in the region who have understood the historical responsibility they face. Timely decision making will save lives. For example, Peru brought together a decree in record time to leverage and consolidate information on the whereabouts and needs of persons with disabilities in order to provide solutions in real time. Excellent!

The story of the *Decameron* continues with beautiful women and gallant men of the Florentine aristocracy that, just as the aristocrats today, took advantage of the quarantine to go and spend time in their luxurious country house. However, none of them had Down Syndrome, was blind, or in a wheelchair. If that had been the case, they wouldn't have been able to leave Florence to enjoy pleasure and happiness. Their ending would have been more like the hell of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, another classic of Italian literature.

People with disabilities are no longer doomed to this precarious end, but there's still a long way to go. With good practices like the one in Peru, the next crisis will surely find us in better shape. People with disabilities in

Florence or in any other place in the world will have the same opportunity to survive than anyone else. Life is a right and it can't be that some are worth more than others. We should be recording this as history for future generations – we need less risks and more solutions.

This is a revised version of this [article](#) which was first published at ¿Y si hablamos de inclusión? with the collaboration of Mariana Pinzón.

IPC updates

Cancellation of the 2020 Extraordinary General Assembly and Membership Gathering

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IPC has cancelled plans to hold the 2020 Membership Gathering and Extraordinary General Assembly where it had aimed to seek approval for its Governance Review proposals.

Rather than bring the IPC membership together in one place in 2020, the IPC has revised its timeline and will put elements from the Governance Review before the membership to vote on at the 2021 IPC General Assembly and either the 2022 IPC Membership Gathering or 2023 IPC General Assembly.

Read the Governance Review 'Remaining Fit for Purpose' [here](#).

Tokyo 2020 Qualification

This is the same information as we published last week, but it remains relevant.

The IPC has published updated qualification regulations for 11 of the 22 sports on the programme of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games: archery, athletics, boccia, goalball, powerlifting, rowing, shooting, swimming, triathlon, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair fencing. Together, these sports represent almost 3,000 of the available 4,400 athlete slots.

Further updates will follow over the coming weeks. We are in regular contact with all IFs, and we hope to have a complete set of qualification regulations published by the end of May 2020.

The most up-to-date version of the Tokyo 2020 qualification regulations can always be found here: <https://www.paralympic.org/tokyo-2020/qualification-criteria>

Para sport event postponements and cancellations

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

Updated COVID-19 guidance from WADA for anti-doping organisations

Following on from its COVID-19 guidance of [20 March](#), the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has issued updated [guidance](#) for the Anti-Doping Organisations (ADOs) focused on the resumption of athlete testing as deconfinement leads to the restart or return to normal of doping control programmes in a number of countries around the world.

WADA developed the guidance after consulting with a group of National Anti-Doping Organisations (NADOs) to determine how the anti-doping community can best operate their testing programmes in this challenging environment. The guidance follows globally recommended health and hygiene procedures and is in line with the [International Standard for Testing and Investigations](#).

The guidance has been refined to reflect the evolving nature of the pandemic, its effect on the global testing programme and the fact that some parts of the world that had suspended or significantly reduced testing are getting back to normal as restrictions begin to be lifted.

World Health Organisation (WHO) update

According to WHO's latest Daily Situation Dashboard on 7 May 2020 09:45 CEST, the number of confirmed worldwide cases has risen to over 3.6 million. Between them, the United States of America and the United Kingdom account for 39 per cent of global deaths. John Hopkins University of Medicine is reporting that nearly 1.25 million people have fully recovered.

WHO notes that although the number of cases reported from Western Europe is declining, more cases are being reported every day from Eastern Europe, Africa, South-East Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Americas. However, even within regions and within countries they see divergent trends and every country and region needs a tailored approach.

This past week has seen the United Nations publish a framework for the socio-economic response to COVID-19. The framework lays out a 'recovery roadmap' for countries to protect lives and livelihoods, and get businesses and economies up and running again as soon as possible. Importantly, the framework takes a 'health first' approach, recognising that strong and resilient health systems must be the foundation of recovery in all countries.

As sports organisations consider what do next, there are a couple of existing WHO documents that detail specific public health guidance for organisers of sports events:

- [Key planning recommendations for Mass Gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak](#) (19 March)
- [Considerations for sports federations/sports event organisers when planning mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19](#) (14 April)

The latter document includes key considerations, such as lower and higher risk sports, size of event, indoor or outdoor locations, venue facilities, demographics and risk communication. Comments are provided on each item, along with risk factors and mitigation measures to consider. It also includes a checklist for sports events organisers and participants, with recommendations to take into account prior to and during the actual events.

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.

WHO's WhatsApp messaging service

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

English

Send "hi" to +41 79 893 18 92 on WhatsApp

wa.me/41798931892?text=hi

French

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

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

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, reviewed 30 April)

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 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](#)