

The IPC's weekly update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - 09/04/2020

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's update starts with some much-needed inspiration. Over the last fortnight on the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) website, we have been featuring Paralympians who are medical professionals and have paused their training routines to work in hospitals and deal with the spread of COVID-19. Everyone in the Paralympic Movement applauds their courage and bravery.

We are sure there are many more stories of athletes, staff at National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) and International Federations (IFs) working as medical professionals around the world right now tackling COVID-19. If you would like to let us know about your story or raise awareness of any other initiative, please contact us at media@paralympic.org

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. We did just this on Tuesday to honour World Health Day when 22 Paralympians said 'Thank You' on behalf of the Movement to healthcare professionals and essential staff like supermarket workers and transport drivers. Watch [here](#).

As part of our strategy to communicate regularly, this week IPC President Andrew Parsons held a media briefing where he updated on how COVID-19 was impacting the IPC and the Paralympic Movement. Speaking to the likes of Reuters, Associated Press, BBC and NHK, Parsons highlighted the measures the IPC is taking to deal with a change of cash flow resulting from Tokyo 2020 postponement. This includes saving more than EUR 1.5 million from its core operational budget for the year. He also detailed the effect the postponement had on qualification and classification. He outlined how he believes the Games will be a sporting and humanitarian triumph, but that we still have a job to do on behalf of the Paralympic Movement to ensure that focus is not lost in Japan on key areas like accessibility.

We wish everyone a safe and joyful Easter, Passover and Ramadan.

This week's update contains the following information:

- The medical Paralympians on the COVID-19 front line
- Tokyo 2020 update
- World Health Organisation update - this includes new WhatsApp languages and documentation on disability
- Latest media statements from the IPC - 'Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes'

Leading from the front - the Paralympians at the forefront of the COVID-19 response

For most Para athletes at present, life is about dealing with COVID-19 in their own personal environment. However, there are a small group of athletes who, as medical professionals, are actively dealing with the health crisis and assisting those suffering from the disease. Here are a few of their stories.

In Spain, one of the hardest hit countries in the world from COVID-19, Para triathlete Susana Rodriguez Gacio has seen the effects of the disease first-hand. The current Para triathlon world champion had been training for Tokyo, but she has put all that on hold to help as a doctor in Santiago de Campostela in Northern Spain.

She offers proper perspective given Spain's situation: "People used to ask me if I preferred sport or medicine, and I always didn't know what to answer, although sports is my passion. Now though, healthcare is the most important thing to all of us. Every morning I see people dying and it's going to get worse."

Rodriguez specialises in rehabilitation and is heavily involved in COVID-19 patients' post treatment. One day on her way to work, a colleague she carools with was tested positive for the virus, and Rodriguez went into self-isolation. Showing amazing commitment, she has continued to work from home, consulting patients on the phone.

In Great Britain, Para table tennis player Kim Daybell is another doctor on the front-line. He was due to start training full-time for Tokyo 2020 on 23 March but is now working full-time at Whittingham Hospital in North London. He is a senior house officer managing COVID-19 patients.

As someone who was hoping to compete in his third Paralympics later this year, Daybell can appreciate how the postponement of Tokyo 2020 has hit many athletes hard.

"I think people might say 'well they just have to wait a year' and when you put things into perspective it is not a big deal - it will happen. But a year is a long time in sport - especially Paralympic sport. All the athletes have been gearing themselves up for this year and there is a lot of stress and high pressure involved and for all that to just dissipate is very difficult.

"But for me personally, I want to try and help as best I can, and it is quite nice to be able to do that. Obviously, table tennis has completely taken a back seat now and sport has as well, but it will always be there for me, so I'll keep it in mind for when this blows over," he said.

For winter sport athletes, the COVID-19 outbreak has decimated their season, but some have moved seamlessly from sport to medicine. Norwegian Para Ice Hockey player Lena Schroder - the only woman of the 135 Para ice hockey players at the PyeongChang 2019 Paralympic Winter Games - was due to take part in the European Championships. However, with that cancelled, she is working as a nurse at a clinical practice that receives patients who cannot go to their GP because they have COVID-19 symptoms. She is testing them.

Likewise, registered nurse Brittani Coury went from sport to healthcare. Last month, the American snowboarder was in Norway picking up a bronze medal in the first and ultimately last World Cup competition of the season.

Last week she started her shifts as a nurse at the University of Utah Hospital. Brittani is bravely personified: "This is the biggest social thing we are facing in my lifetime. I am mentally ready and prepared for this. I am not afraid of getting the virus, because I am here to help my patients. I am not afraid of dying either, because if that happens, it's because I was helping others and I went out doing what I loved," said the 34-year-old Colorado native.

A special mention also for one athlete who is not a medical professional but is helping assist those in hospitals and surgeries. US sitting volleyball player Bethany Zummo has been using her skills as a seamstress and creating filtered hospital masks at home and distributing them among her Dublin, California, community to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

But the last word goes to Spanish athlete Rodriguez, who we think speaks for all athletes when she says how much she is looking forward to Tokyo 2020: “When we get there, those Games will be very special and we’ll celebrate them in an environment of health, freedom and peace for all.”

Tokyo 2020 next steps

This week we wrote to International Federations to update them with regards to the revised qualification criteria. The key details of that are below:

- With the new dates for the Games, all the International Federations are having to adjust their established qualification criteria. We have asked where possible, the allocation methods of the original qualification criteria should be preserved. Federations are encouraged to follow a like-for-like approach by replacing lost qualification opportunities with comparable events in the future
- Slots that have been obtained by athletes for their respective NPCs by 24 March 2020 should not be altered.
- We appreciate that a sport-specific balance needs to be found between protecting those athletes who were close to qualifying based on the previous 2020 deadlines and ensuring the participation of the best athletes at Tokyo 2020 by allowing the top performers of the 2021 season to qualify.
- It is at each International Federation’s discretion to set new deadlines for athletes to become eligible for selection by their NPC.
- The principle of “No Classification at Tokyo 2020” remains in place. We will work with each International Federation in order to explore possible options and ensure that athletes will have sufficient access to classification opportunities prior to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Additional, Tokyo 2020 has written to all NPCs and updated on the schedule for key dates for the Games. Nearly all these dates are ‘to be confirmed’. Tokyo 2020 expects to be able to provide more updates from May. It is worth noting that Tokyo is one of the areas of Japan that has been declared in a state of emergency. This now means that our Tokyo colleagues are also home working.

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

World Health Organisation update

Thursday 9 April 2020 marks 100 days since World Health Organisation (WHO) was notified of the first cases of “pneumonia with unknown cause” in China. No-one could have predicted the dramatic impact those 100 days would have had on the world.

According to WHO’s latest Daily Situation Dashboard on 9 April 2020 02:00 CEST, the number of confirmed worldwide cases has once more risen sharply, from 857,641 cases last Thursday to 1,438,994 cases this week. John Hopkins University of Medicine is reporting that over 337,000 people have fully recovered.

The USA is now the country most heavily impacted by the disease, with over 395,000 cases. Much of the world remains in lockdown, having been asked to stay at home in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. However, there is progress - this week Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus emerged, came out of lockdown.

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 that provides the latest news and information on coronavirus now has more languages in addition to Arabic, English, French and Spanish. In the last week Hindi, Italian and Portuguese have been added. The service now had more than 12 million followers around the world.

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>

Additional reference reading

The WHO and other inter-agency organisations have created some specific publications relating to COVID-19, disability, mental health, marginalised and vulnerable peoples.

Disability considerations during the covid-19 outbreak

- This 10-page document is available in English, French and Spanish and looks at actions and preventative measures for people with disabilities. It considers what people can do personally, what governments, health care and disability service providers can also do. To access click [here](#).

Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak

- This WHO pamphlet provides guidance for the general population, healthcare workers, managers in healthcare facilities, carers of children, and those with underlying health conditions and their carers. Click [here](#).

COVID-19: How to include marginalised and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement

- There is an inter-agency publication that focusses on marginalised people acknowledging they become even more vulnerable in emergencies. It includes pages on those with disabilities, refugees, and pre-existing medical conditions. Click [here](#).

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 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](#)