

## **The IPC's weekly update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - 19/03/2020**

The purpose of this weekly update is to keep Para athletes, IPC members and other stakeholders informed of the latest developments with the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, particularly as it relates to Para sport and the upcoming Paralympic Games. This week's update contains the following information:

- **A message from IPC President Andrew Parsons**
- **Latest World Health Organisation update**
- **Updates on the impact on Games preparation, qualification and classification for Tokyo 2020**
- **Latest media statements from the IPC - 'Games Preparation' and 'Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes'**

There will also be two further updates this week from the IPC. First, we will provide an update on cancelled events, which we will now aim to keep updated daily on the IPC website [here](#).

Second, we will publish on Friday a Q&A that is a collation of the conversations that have taken place this week between the IPC and the National Paralympic Committees (NPCs), the IPC Athletes' Council and the International Federations.

To everyone in the Paralympic Movement, thank you for your patience and support during what we know is an incredibly difficult time for you.

### **A message from IPC President Andrew Parsons**

Dear athletes, dear members, dear friends,

Humanity is confronting a unique challenge with multiple countries, cities and communities around the world facing a situation like never before.

These are unprecedented and uncertain times and we are experiencing a moment that is much, much bigger than sport.

As always, we have a duty of care to all of those involved in the Paralympic Movement and we will do what is right by you. The health and well-being of Para athletes remains our top priority and if this means the cancellation of sport events for the next weeks as part of a global containment strategy of COVID 19, then so be it, this is the correct thing to do. As a global community, we must be united and take all the measures we can to preserve health and, most importantly, protect life.

For nearly seven years now we have dreamt of what we can achieve together at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. We have all worked so hard to make these the most exciting and anticipated Games in our history. Almost everything is in place for what I know will be truly spectacular and record-breaking Games.

With 159 days to go, preparations for the Games continue apace and we are doing all we can to ensure the Paralympics open as planned on 25 August 2020. Please know that we are well aware of the current situation and its serious impact around the world. However, for now time is on our side to determine whether or not more drastic measures need to be taken. We continue to be in close and regular dialogue with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the IOC, Tokyo 2020 and our own health experts.

We fully understand that the cancellation of competitions has led to uncertainty with qualification and classification opportunities. I can assure you that the IPC team is working around the clock to try and find solutions to every scenario we face. We also sympathise with those Para athletes who are also unable to train as usual right now and are creatively looking for solutions at home.

On Monday, the IPC Governing Board was updated on the latest situation and this week, I, together with our CEO and senior members of the IPC Management Team are speaking to International Federations, National Paralympic Committees and athlete representatives about the ongoing outbreak and the issues it is causing.

Driving these conversations are three guiding principles: health and wellbeing of athletes, flexibility and fairness.

We want to help and find solutions where we can, but we do not have a crystal ball that tells us what happens next with this unique global crisis. The picture is changing not just each day, but every single hour.

I can promise you that over the coming weeks and months, as the picture becomes clearer, the International Federations, together with us, will find fair solutions for all athletes regarding Tokyo 2020 qualification and classification.

As the world faces one of its biggest challenges in a generation, we ask for your patience and flexibility, and encourage you all to keep focussed on the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics. They are a Games that are already transforming Japan and I hope this summer will transform the world. In

the Paralympic Movement we are no stranger to challenges and obstacles in our way. As before, one way or another, we will find a solution.

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

The global situation has changed markedly since our last update a week ago. According to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) latest Daily Situation Dashboard on 18 March 2020 18:00 CET, there have been 207,860 confirmed worldwide cases in 166 countries.

China has been seeing a marked decline in cases and as of 18 March reported no new domestic cases. In Japan there are 873 cases and the worst affected prefecture of Hokkaido has lifted its state of emergency.

The focus on dealing with the threat of COVID-19 has this week switched from Asia to Europe, which now accounts for most new cases. The disease continues to spread throughout the Americas and Africa.

In the last week the scale of impact from COVID-19 has been unprecedented. In addition to the cancellation of nearly all sport across the world for the next two months, many countries have implemented travel bans (both national and international), the closure of educational establishments, leisure facilities and shops, while any kind of mass gathering is increasingly prohibited. All these physical distancing measures can help to slow transmission of the virus and reduce the burden on health systems.

WHO continues to recommend that isolating, testing and treating every suspected case, and tracing every contact, must be the backbone of the response in every country. This is the best hope of preventing widespread community transmission.

The most accurate source of information on COVID-19 is the [WHO site](#) - they are providing 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. The site now includes a section on how homecare can be provided as safely as possible.

The WHO also has encouraging updates: the first vaccine trial has begun, just 60 days after the genetic sequence of the virus was shared by China. WHO notes this as an "incredible achievement" and has praised the international scientific community for their solidarity in generating and

sharing the robust data needed to show which treatments are most effective.

The IPC continues to use the WHO as its main source of information regarding the COVID-19 outbreak. Indeed, we recommend the WHO as your starting point for additional information gathering.

### **Impact on Tokyo 2020 preparations and qualification**

Tokyo 2020 staff continue to work, although many are now working from home. IPC staff are also now working remotely, as are IOC staff. Wherever we are located, we all are working towards the same goal, which is to put on the Games in Tokyo in August.

However, the sheer volume of containment measures means that nearly all our qualification events until the end of April are either postponed or cancelled.

Each International Federation is responsible for the qualification criteria for their sport and the IPC is in regular dialogue with each of them and offering support where needed. All International Federations impacted by cancelled events are currently reviewing their qualification criteria for Tokyo 2020 and/or looking at possible solutions, including rescheduling of events.

Any changes to the Tokyo 2020 qualification criteria will be published [here](#). The final two pages of the document register all changes to the criteria. The last changes made were on 6 March 2020 to the sports of swimming and taekwondo.

### **Impact on classification**

The cancellation or postponement of Para sport events around the world is also having an impact on classification opportunities for Para athletes ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

The IPC is holding individual calls with each IF, which will continue to take place through Monday, 23 March. The purpose of these calls is to try to determine the impact of the cancelled events on classification and to look at possible solutions. The classification team at the IPC are working tirelessly on this issue.

We are continuing to explore every single classification scenario there is. Nothing is off the table, but ideally all classification would be completed prior to arrival in Tokyo in August.

## **Latest IPC media statements**

### **Games preparation**

With just over 150 days to go, preparations for Tokyo 2020 continue and we are doing all we can to ensure the Paralympics open as planned on 25 August 2020. We are not oblivious to the unprecedented current situation and we continue to be in close and regular dialogue with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the IOC, Tokyo 2020 and our own health experts.

We must be honest however and acknowledge that the situation the world faces right now is much bigger than sport. Our priority as a united global community must be to take all possible measures to preserve health and, most importantly, protect life.

We fully understand that the cancellation of competitions has led to uncertainty regarding qualification and classification opportunities. The IPC team, which is now working remotely from its office in Bonn, Germany, is working around the clock to try and find solutions to every scenario we face. We also sympathise greatly with Para athletes who are also unable to train as usual right now and are creatively looking for solutions at home.

On Monday, the IPC Governing Board met via teleconference to receive an update on the situation. This call focussed on the cancellation of competitions, the impact on athlete classification and the current inability of many Para athletes around the world to train.

IPC President Andrew Parsons led calls with National Paralympic Committees (NPCs), the IPC Athletes' Council and athlete representatives from NPCs and International Federations on Tuesday and Wednesday. He, together with the CEO and senior members of the IPC Management Team, provided updates on preparations for Tokyo 2020, outlined the measures the IPC is taking to try and find solutions regarding qualification and athlete classification, and answered questions.

Individual calls between the IPC and International Federations with sports on the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic programme are also taking place through

to next Monday. The aim of these calls is to get a clearer picture of the impact of cancelled competitions on qualification and athlete classification and to discuss potential solutions.

### **Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes**

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](#)
- [Tokyo 2020 Qualification Criteria](#)