

## The IPC's weekly update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - 23/04/2020

The purpose of this weekly update - which is now our eighth since the beginning of March and our eleventh in total - is to keep everyone within the Paralympic Movement informed of the latest developments with the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

This week in the newsletter we have the second of our three-part series on mindfulness. This has been prepared by 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.

Mindfulness is the process of intentionally bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment without judgment. Last week Debra examined the concepts of acceptance and 'control' of the COVID-19 situation, this week she looks at the choices you can make.

She outlines how, during this time in isolation, our actions will shift from 'doing' to 'being', and that this period will provide an opportunity to pause and reflect as we become more aware of our thoughts, feelings and sensations. Practically, Debra explores how the human senses can be used to engage with ourselves and others in a more meaningful way, and can help make isolation less of a burden.

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 continue to hear and report on great stories of how athletes are addressing the challenges of COVID-19. These stories below are from the last week - click on the link for the full story.

- Colombian Para swimmer Paola Mosquera is an ER doctor in her native Bogota and is on the frontline helping COVID-19 [patients](#).
- 60 wheelchair racers from all around the world came together virtually to 'race' in the Boston Marathon that was scheduled to take place last [week](#).
- Champion Dutch rower Annika van der Meer is also a paediatric doctor and has put her sporting career on hold to offer support in dealing with COVID-19 [patients](#).
- Para swimming world champion Tully Kearney is another athlete putting her practical skills to use. The British ace has used her sewing expertise for make face masks for friends and families, complete with filters. She is also making cloth laundry bags for staff at her local hospital to [use](#).

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)

With the holy month of Ramadan starting today, we would like to wish all Muslims in the Paralympic Movement around the world Ramadan Kareem.

This week's update contains the following information:

- Getting our heads around the COVID-19 Part Two, by Dr. Debra Alexander, IPC Board Governing Member
- Tokyo 2020 updates, including details of the creation of the Outbreak Prevention Taskforce in endurance sports
- World Health Organisation update
- Latest media statements from the IPC - 'Potential impact of COVID-19 on Para Athletes'

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

As we again attempt to understand the impact of COVID-19, I wanted to return to the theme of choice. We can choose to allow isolation to defeat us, or we can choose to rise above it, in it and through it. We can embrace the challenge.

Given that our lives are generally go, go, go, with a focus on faster, higher, further, more, more and more, it is rare that one is forced to stay at home,

get off the hamster wheel, bow out of the rat race and switch off the automatic pilot. This isolation, therefore, for many of us may feel like a blessing in disguise but for others a curse.

When one is relentlessly pursuing a goal, isolation because of COVID-19, can be hugely frustrating and disappointing. The first thoughts that come to mind for many athletes, are around training, fitness, shape, refocussing, build up to the Games and filling their days. We are so programmed to do, that the thought of not 'doing' and not knowing is completely terrifying.

During the first few days stuck at home, we were busy catching up with all the things we have been meaning to do for the last year, such as admin, sorting out the cupboards, putting all the old, unused clothes and shoes aside for charity, cleaning the car – the list is endless. We make those phone calls to family and friends we had been meaning to call but were far too busy to do so. We read the books and journal articles we had stacked away for a rainy day. We follow our planned structured programmes and yet slowly but surely, some of us start feeling restless, trapped, frustrated and miserable. People around us are on-edge, jittery and worried, the apartment feels like it is slowly closing in on us and our moods and sense of humour start going south.

One reason we may start feeling so miserable, angry and frustrated with this isolation is that may be we do not know how to just be with whatever is, in the present moment. We spend most of our lives in the 'doing' mode and rarely ever slow down enough to appreciate the 'being' mode. We have forgotten how to be because being, unless it is being busy, is sometimes perceived as lazy, unmotivated or slack.

'Doing' in sport, academia and business is also applauded and rewarded and ultimately keeps us striving. However, I am sure you will agree, it often comes at a huge cost. Now I am not for one minute suggesting you stop 'doing' because doing your job/work (whatever this means to you) may be your only means of survival. What I am suggesting though is that there are other ways of 'doing' and 'being' in the world. Learning how to be, hugely impacts 'doing' in ways you cannot begin to imagine – I speak from experience. By merely changing my 'being' I have become more centred, open, curious, awake, efficient and effective in my daily life and in my 'doing'.

Isolation due to the spread of the COVID-19 brings with it some wonderful opportunities, it gives us time to pause and reflect. It gives us a once in a life-time chance to step off the hamster wheel and put the brakes on our automatic pilot. It reminds us that we can choose to make ourselves miserable by desperately trying to kick start the automatic pilot again or that we can take the time to become reacquainted with the 'being' mode of life - we are after all human beings not human doings.

One way to rediscover the being mode, is to reconnect with ourselves - we can do this through the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness means intentionally, paying attention to the present moment (the moment can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral), in a kind, compassionate and non-judgemental way.

Mindfulness teaches us awareness, it teaches us to sustain attention and shift attention, it teaches us awareness of our thoughts, feelings and sensations. When we are in touch with our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensation we are more easily able to register distress signals, make sense of them and consequently instead of reacting to situations, we can respond in an informed and appropriate way.

We can start our mindfulness journey by getting in touch with our senses through bringing awareness to the senses of taste, hearing, smell, seeing and touch. If sight, hearing or touch is not possible for you, focus on the other senses.

You may wish to try the following: intentionally waking up early to watch the sun rise - there is nothing more exhilarating and uplifting than intentionally welcoming in the day.

Get out of bed and stand or sit at an open window or door or go outside, if you can. Take a few deep breaths, fill your lungs with the morning air and when you are ready to do so, take a moment to, just where you are standing or sitting, settle and 'ground' yourself in the moment, bring your awareness to your feet or your bottom making contact with the floor or the chair, notice the pressure, the texture, the temperature. When you are ready, shift your awareness to your posture, notice whether, if possible, it is dignified, upright. If this is not possible it is ok. Notice the sensation of just standing or sitting, bringing awareness to the whole body, it's energy and status. No need to adjust anything, simply bring a gentle awareness and curiosity to

the experience of just being, in this moment, in a kind, compassionate, non-judgemental way.

As night turns into day, if possible, bring your awareness to the wonders of sight, if not possible move to focussing the spotlight on sound, below. Gazing into the distance, notice colours and textures on the horizon, notice the landscape, the presence of clouds or the moon in the sky – notice as things shift and change moment by moment. No need for interpretation or trying to make sense of anything or your experience, simply bring awareness to the sensation of sight.

When you are ready, shift the spotlight of attention to noticing sound or the absence of it. Notice the silence or perhaps the sounds in the distance or close by, notice the sounds of the birds, dogs barking, the wind in the trees, the cars, trucks or trains. Allow yourself to rest in the incredible sensation of hearing or not hearing.

Next, shift the spotlight of attention to sensing smell. Notice the odours in the air – notice the freshness of the morning, the smell of the neighbours' breakfast, the scent from the family bathroom or the staleness of the garbage bins left outside – simply notice any and all sensations of smell.

When it is comfortable for you, shift the focus of your attention to the sensation of taste. Notice this experience whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, notice any after taste from the early morning coffee, the toothpaste or the garlic from last night's meal. Simply register the sensation, without getting caught up in any thoughts around the taste experience.

Lastly, bring your awareness to the sensation of touch (not touch as in touching with one's hand but the feeling on one's skin) - notice the warmth of the sun on your skin or the temperature of the surrounding air, the cool breeze or the bite of the wind, the texture of the fabric of your clothes against your skin – and simply allow yourself to rest in awareness of the sensation of touch, again, without any need to unpack the experience.

Notice the experience of coming home to your senses and this profound way of honouring the gift of direct sensory contact with yourself and the world. When we create a space where we intuitively can connect with our inner and outer worlds, we create an opportunity to engage with ourselves and subsequently others in a different and more meaningful way.

Learning to engage with ourselves and others in a more meaningful way will go a long way to lifting our isolation burden. The change starts with each one of us - we can carry on running from ourselves or we can choose to stop, 'be' and reconnect with ourselves.

And in this time we should be thankful, be kind, be compassionate, and be mindful.

### **Tokyo 2020 updates**

The planning and rebuilding of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games continues apace. It will however likely not be until late July before there are full updates on the venues and competition schedule.

There will, over the coming days and weeks, be several practical updates from Tokyo 2020 for National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) in the areas of accreditation, accommodation, rate cards and ticketing. As these are updated, we will also surface the information in this update.

Please note that from 29 April until 6 May, it is a holiday week in Japan - this is the 'Golden Week', a collection of four national holidays within seven days.

### **The creation of the Outbreak Prevention Taskforce**

This week saw the creation of a new medical taskforce to provide endurance events, that include mass gatherings, with guidelines for outbreak prevention.

The Outbreak Prevention Taskforce, led by World Athletics (Health and Science Department) and the International Institute for Running Medicine (IIRM), will include the Medical Chairs or representatives of the International Cycling Union (UCI), International Ski Federation (FIS), International Triathlon Union (ITU), International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and World Rowing (FISA), as well as Professor Brian McCloskey of the Centre on Global Health Security, Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), an independent expert in outbreak prevention.

Dr. Stephane Bermon, Director of the Health and Science Department at World Athletics, who is also acting as an expert advisor to the IPC Medical and Scientific Department, commented: "We are forming this taskforce to bring together key representatives from all parts of the endurance sports world to help find solutions and create viable and appropriate guidelines

for participants of mass sports events, event staff, volunteers, and the community at large.”

The Outbreak Prevention Taskforce has developed the following objectives:

- Disseminate recommendations to prevent disease outbreaks in mass gatherings
- Provide race organisers and sport governing bodies with guidelines, including a risk assessment tool dedicated to determining the outbreak risk, mitigation plans, and suggestions of contingency plan.
- Advise mass races, organisers, and sport governing bodies on how to plan a return to normal activities in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak or similar future situations.
- Collect and analyse data to determine if COVID-19 survivors have increased risk of developing illness or injury when participating in endurance events and/or vigorous activities and amend best practices based on this analysis.

The Outbreak Prevention Taskforce held its first meeting this week with the aim of producing guidelines as soon as reasonably possible.

#### 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 23 April 2020 02:00 CEST, the number of confirmed worldwide cases has risen to over 2.5 million. John Hopkins University of Medicine is reporting that over 721,000 people have fully recovered.

The United States of America remains the world's most heavily impacted country in terms of cases and deaths – it has now recorded four times as many cases as the next nearest country (Spain).

A concern for WHO is how difficult the disease is to map – they are seeing different trends in different regions, and even within regions. They do note positively that most of the epidemics in Western Europe appear to be stable or declining. However, although numbers are low, they are also seeing worrying upward trends in Africa, Central and South America, and Eastern Europe. WHO point out that most countries are still in the early

stages of their epidemics, and that some countries that were affected early in the pandemic are now starting to see a resurgence in cases. They claim we should be under no illusions as we have a long way to go and that this virus will be with us for an extended time.

As this virus remains extremely dangerous, the WHO is guarding against complacency and argues that stay-at-home orders and other physical distancing measures are successful in suppressing transmission in many countries.

They maintain that the same six public health measures they have been advocating since the beginning of the pandemic must remain the backbone of the response in all countries.

1. Find every case
2. Isolate every case;
3. Test every case;
4. Care for every case;
5. Trace and quarantine every contact;
6. Educate, engage and empower your people.

They claim that countries that do not do these six central things, and do them consistently, will see more cases, and more lives will be lost.

Science is trying its best to fight back, and today in both Germany and the United Kingdom the first human trials of a vaccine for COVID-19 started.

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](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](#)