

ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY

ATHLETE OATH: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

SECTION L - STATEMENT OF ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS (Excerpt from the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules)

General Statement of Eligibility.

Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person with intellectual disabilities who is at least eight years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the General Rules.

Age Requirements.

There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics. The minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age. An accredited Program may permit children who are at least six years old to participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs offered by that Accredited Program, or in specific (and age-appropriate) cultural or social activities offered during the course of a Special Olympics event. Such children may be recognized for their participation in such training or other non-competition activities through certificates of participation, or through other types of recognition approved by SOI which are not associated with participation in Special Olympics competition. However, no child may participate in a Special Olympics competition (or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition) before his or her eighth birthday.

Degree of Disability.

Participation in Special Olympics training and competition is open to all persons with intellectual disabilities who meet the age requirements, regardless of the level or degree of that person's disability, and whether or not that person also has other intellectual or physical disabilities, so long as that person registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the General Rules.

Identifying Persons with Intellectual Disabilities.

A person is considered to have intellectual disabilities for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Special Olympics if that person satisfies any one of the following requirements:

- The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities; or
- The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or "IQ" testing or other measures that are generally accepted within the professional community in that Accredited Program's nation as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay; or
- The person has a closely related developmental disability. A "closely related developmental disability" means having functional limitations in both cognitive skills and practical adaptive skills (such as in conceptual skills, social skills, recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care). However, persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes, but may be eligible to volunteer for Special Olympics as partners in

Unified Sports®, if they otherwise meet the separate eligibility requirements for participation in Unified Sports® set forth in the Sports Rules

Preserving Flexibility in Identifying Eligible Athletes

An Accredited Program may request limited permission from SOI to depart from the eligibility requirements specified above if the Accredited Program believes that there are exceptional circumstances that warrant such a departure and so notifies SOI in writing. SOI will consider such requests promptly, but shall have the final authority to determine whether any departure or exception is appropriate.

Multiple Handicaps

Persons who have multiple handicaps may participate in Special Olympics provided they are eligible under Section L of the Special Olympics Sports Rules.

Participation by Individuals with Down Syndrome Who Have Atlanto-axial Instability (article 1, Section F, Special Olympics Sports Rules)

In light of medical research indicating that up to 15% of individuals with Down syndrome have a mal-alignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and C-2 in the neck known as Atlanto-axial instability, exposing them to possible injury if they participate in activities that hyperextend or radically flex the neck or upper spine, all Accredited Programs must take the following precautions before permitting athletes with Down syndrome to participate in certain physical activities:

- Athletes with Down syndrome may participate in most Special Olympics sports training and competition, but shall not be permitted to participate in any activities which, by their nature, result in hyper-extension, radical flexion or direct pressure on the neck or upper spine, unless the requirements of subsections (2) and (3) below are satisfied. Such sports training and competition activities include: butterfly stroke and diving starts in swimming, diving, pentathlon, high jump, squat lifts, equestrian sports, artistic gymnastics, football (soccer), alpine skiing and any warm-up exercise placing undue stress on the head and neck.
- An athlete with Down syndrome may be permitted to participate in the activities described in subsection (1) above if that athlete is examined (including x-ray views of full extension and flexion of neck) by a physician who has been briefed on the nature of the Atlanto-axial instability condition, and who determines, based on the results of that examination, that the athlete does not have an Atlanto-axial instability condition.
- An athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed by a physician as having an Atlanto-axial instability condition may nevertheless be permitted to participate in the activities described in subsection (1) above if the athlete, or the parent or guardian of a minor athlete, confirms in writing his or her decision to proceed with these activities notwithstanding the risks created by the Atlanto-axial instability, and two (2) Licensed Medical Professionals certify in writing that they have explained these risks to the athlete and his/her parent or guardian, and that the athlete's condition does not, in their judgment, preclude the athlete from participating in Special Olympics. These statements and certifications shall be documented and provided to Accredited Programs using the standardized form approved by SOI, entitled "Special Release for Athletes with Atlanto-axial Instability," and any revisions of that form, approved by SOI (the "Special Release Concerning Atlanto-axial Instability").

Profound Disabilities

Individuals with profound disabilities can participate through Special Olympics Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) (link 1-10) developed by physical educators, physical therapists and recreation therapists. MATP emphasizes training and participation rather than competition.