

Return to Sport and Physical Activity for People with Disabilities

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An Inclusive Response



We encourage the sports, fitness and leisure, outdoors, health and education sectors to use this guidance document to enable a safe and inclusive return to sport and physical activity for everyone.

●● Introduction

Sport and physical activity are central to the fabric of life in Ireland. There is a growing awareness and understanding that peoples' lives can be enhanced through participation, especially by improving health and wellbeing, increasing social interaction and empowering people to be the best they can be. As citizens of this state, people with disabilities deserve to have equal opportunities to experience the benefits that participation in sport, physical activity, exercise and outdoor activities can bring. Over the past number of years there have been many positive developments and opportunities for people with disabilities here in Ireland. Embedded within the National Sports Policy and Sport Ireland Policy on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Sport, is a clear commitment to enhance sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities.

COVID-19 has presented a huge challenge for everyone in society to seek alternative ways of participating in sport, physical activity, exercise and outdoor activities. For many people with disabilities this has been a very difficult time as they will not have had access to their local clubs, outdoor amenities, coaches, training facilities and equipment.

As sport and physical activity opportunities continue to reopen, it is important to consider the safe return for people with disabilities. People with disabilities have highlighted 5 key principles within the **National Sport Inclusion Disability Charter** which they feel are important factors to consider in supporting their participation in sport and physical activity. Taking the impact of Covid 19 into consideration, the following are some key tips that you as a sport and physical activity provider can take into account, ensuring a safe and inclusive return for everyone.

The return of participants with a disability should be considered on a case by case basis depending on the nature of the activity, the environment, and if the participant has any underlying health conditions. It is important to note that not all people with disabilities will have an underlying health condition that may pose an added risk to their health and wellbeing in relation to COVID-19. It is also important to note that some people with disabilities may not require any adaptations or additional supports in their participation in sport or physical activity.

People with disabilities need to be considered within all plans regarding returning to sport, physical activity, exercise and outdoor activities.



Please Note: All activity should be consistent with the government guidance regarding health, social distancing and hygiene. See latest Government updates at www.gov.ie/covid19



●● Key Principles to Consider



Openness

Be open and considerate of people with a disability and ensure that everyone in the organisation is confident and competent in the delivery and support of people with a disability in their return to your sport or activities.

- 1 Be open to and considerate of people with disabilities in your planning and programme development. Where possible include people with disabilities or individuals with long term illnesses in your discussion and solutions.
- 2 Connect with all your members, staff, and participants with a disability using a personalised email or message. This may alleviate any feelings of worry or anxiety they may be feeling on their return to your sport.
- 3 Ensure that you provide your information in a number of alternative formats to ensure that everyone can read, hear and understand your message.

People

Educate all staff, board members, administrators, coaches, officials, teachers, parents and players on the benefits and opportunities for including and reintroducing people with a disability into your sport or organisation.

- 1 Keep your staff, coaches, volunteers and members etc. updated on all new changes by providing training and support before they return to their work or sporting environment. This may include Induction training for staff or return to sport / activities training for participants and athletes.
- 2 Provide your staff and volunteers with Disability Awareness Training to ensure they understand why it is important to be inclusive in their approach and environment.
- 3 Appoint an Inclusion Officer to your organisation or to your clubs to ensure the message of inclusion is maintained and also to act as a point of contact for a person with a disability.

 [See Cara Training Programmes](#)



Activities

Develop and coordinate your opportunities for participation, volunteering, teaching and coaching etc. which should remain inclusive of people with a disabilities and are still available at different levels.



- 1 Consider the flexibility of your sessions, groups and activities. Many people with disabilities or people with long-term health conditions may be concerned about their current fitness level or may have reduced mobility as a result of the lack of participation. Remember home digital sessions will still be needed by some participants.
- 2 Allow time at the beginning of sessions or activities to address any participant concerns, ideally through one-to-one private consultation. Some participants may prefer to get to your session earlier to minimise stress due to the extra precautions in place. More time may be needed for access to changing and toilet facilities where available.
- 3 Consider any new changes to your sports grounds, facilities and your outdoor environments and ensure that these are communicated to all your members or stakeholders prior to returning. Ensure appropriate signage that is readable and understandable by everyone. Allow enough space for social distancing to include wheelchairs, crutches, mobility scooters etc.
- 4 Be considerate of individuals who may need extra support or care when transferring to or from their wheelchair, changing clothing, use of equipment etc. Support where possible should be carried out by household members ideally, where Personal Assistants are required, use of PPE is recommended.
- 5 Be mindful that some individuals with disabilities may require support or guidance when participating, e.g. an individual who is blind or vision impaired may require a guide or pilot to support their participation in your sport/activities.

 [See Cara TREE Model](#)

 [See Cara Inclusion Continuum](#)



Facilities

Review and ensure that facilities, outdoor amenities or sites that are used operationally for programmes and administration are accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities.



[See Cara Access Audit](#)

- 1 If changes have been made in your parking area, ensure disability parking, drop off, & pick up points are still available.
- 2 Create virtual tour of facilities or environments, promote changes you have made to entrances and exits.
- 3 Communicate any changes you have made to methods of payments within your facility/programmes.
- 4 Provide accessible hand sanitiser stations and maintain access to accessible toilets and changing rooms at all times.
- 5 Ensure any assistive technology or specialist equipment is working. If you are limiting the amount of equipment, you need to ensure that inclusive products remain available e.g. hoists, induction loops, dual usage fitness equipment etc.
- 6 Review and ensure that facilities or sites that are used operationally for programmes and administration are accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities. Fitness operators should consult with and adhere to [Ireland Active's Framework for Safe Operation and Government Protocols](#).



Promotion and Communication

Communicate the measures you are taking to return to sport/activity and publish all changes made in your sport, programmes, activities, environments and facilities.

- 1 Use alternative formats in all your new resources and signage. ie. large print, text only and easy read.
- 2 Ensure the promotion of positive inclusive images of people with disabilities participating in sport, coaching and volunteering opportunities are used.
- 3 Use a number of platforms to share your information with people with disabilities and remember not everyone uses social media.
- 4 Link with your National Governing Body of Sport and your Local Sports Partnerships to increase the promotion of the work you are doing to ensure an inclusive return to your sport and physical activity offerings.



[See Cara Inclusive Promotion & Communications Guidelines](#)

This guide was developed in conjunction with the following organisations:



For further support or guidance on the return to sport and physical activity for people with disabilities, please connect with your Local Sports Partnership or Disability Sport Organisation.

