

## **Coronavirus (COVID-19): British Paralympic Association statement on Athlete Classification during the phased return of sport – 9 July 2020**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to support UK National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) to include all Classification activities as part of their Returning to Competition plans. NGBs' Classification activities include National Classification, hosting International Classification opportunities sanctioned by the sport's International Federation and supporting their athletes during International Classification.

With sport making a phased and coordinated resumption of training ahead of any return to competition, the British Paralympic Association is issuing this statement on Para Athlete Classification to complement the existing guidance already issued by the [Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport](#) and implemented by NGBs.

The purpose of the existing and future guidance is to minimise the risk to the elite sports community, athletes and the friends, family and fans who support them. It also aims to minimise the pressure elite sport places on the wider community and healthcare workers during any resumption of activity.

Each NGB should by now have appointed COVID-19 Officers who have been carrying out risk assessments and forming risk mitigation strategies, in collaboration with venues and facility providers.

UK NGB's Lead Classification Officer should contact their sport's COVID-19 Officer to ensure Classification practices are included in a sport and venue specific risk assessment and that a risk mitigation strategy is formed, prior to any Classification activities being resumed.

### **Principles of Returning to Competition**

Returning to Competition is a staged process, from Stage 1 (Individual Outdoor Field Based Training or Individual Gym Conditioning) through to Stage 5 (Competition with no restrictions and spectators present). NGBs must complete Stage 1 before proceeding to Stage 2 and so on.

National Classification activities should not resume until both the sport and the venue are at Stage 3 (Domestic Competition – No Spectators). Hosting International Classification should only occur when both the sport and the venue are at Stage 4 (Cross Border – No Spectators).

The safety protocols established by the nation, local public health authority, NGB and venue should apply to both National and International Classification activities when they recommence.

### **Elements of Classification that can only happen in person**

There is an aspect of the Classification process, often referred to as the medical test or bench test, that involves Classifiers coming into close proximity and physically touching athletes. These tests include testing range of movement, muscle strength or muscle tone and can be included in the list of non-essential medical procedures. These tests should only be carried out following approval from, and using protocols laid out by, the NGB's COVID-19 Medical Officer. This may include Classifiers wearing personal protective equipment during elements of the Classification process as per the guidance at the time.

If it is likely that Classifiers will need to come within 2 metres of an athlete or will need to physically touch the athlete to complete the Classification process, athletes should be made aware of this before they are allocated a slot for Classification evaluation. It should also be made clear that while all steps will be taken by the NGB, local organising committee and Classifiers to minimise the risk of infection, a level of risk will always remain.

### **Elements of Classification that can happen “virtually”**

NGBs can still accept and process athletes' Medical Diagnostic Forms (MDFs), prior to Classification activities being resumed. However, athletes' ability to secure additional and up-to-date medical information might be difficult in the current climate. NGBs should also look to manage expectations of athletes submitting MDFs and make it clear when it is not possible to specify a date when Classification activities are likely to resume.

Certain elements of Classifier training and development and Classification education can occur via video conference call or webinar – but any practical demonstrations involving Classifiers and trainees coming into close proximity and physically touching athletes should only be carried out after a sport and venue specific risk assessment and risk mitigation strategy has been written and implemented.

### **Further reading**

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's guidance on the phased return of sport and recreation can be read [here](#).

The International Paralympic Committee's guidelines on COVID-19 and hygiene and infection control to support event organisers and classification stakeholders can be read [here](#).

The UK Athlete Classification Code, that clarifies organisational responsibility for classification in the UK can be read [here](#).

Further information on the Classification process, including a 3-minute animated video, can be seen [here](#).