

## **General Statement**

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

## **Age Requirement**

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. A program may permit children who are at least six years old to participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs, 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-competitive activities through certificates of participation, or through other types of recognition 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.

## **Identifying Persons with Cognitive Disabilities**

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

- 1) The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having a cognitive disability as determined by their localities; or
- 2) The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or "IQ" testing or other measures which are generally accepted within the professional community as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay; or
- 3) The person has a closely related developmental disability. A "closely related developmental disability" means having functional limitations in both general learning (such as IQ) and in adaptive skills (such as in 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 volunteer for Special Olympics.

## **Participation by Individuals with Down Syndrome who have Atlanto-axial Instability**

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 programs must take the following precautions before permitting athletes with Down syndrome to participate in certain physical activities:

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.

## Statement of Eligibility (continued)

### 1. Identification for Eligibility

The person is 8 years of age or older and is identified by a professional agency (or school, area agency, etc.) as;

