Purpose:

To ensure that coaches are aware of the possible safety concerns related to athletes with Down Syndrome.

Medical research indicates that seventeen percent (17%) of all people with Down Syndrome could be affected by a condition known as Atlantoaxial Instability. Those affected by this condition are susceptible to serious spinal cord injury if their neck is severely bent or jarred (if marked flexing of the neck occurs).

As recommended by Special Olympics Canada, Special Olympics Manitoba has adopted the following policy:

- All athletes with Down syndrome must be examined (including x-rays with views of the neck fully extended and flexed) by a physician who has been briefed on the nature of the Atlantoaxial Instability. Individuals need only be x-rayed once and, if found negative, are not restricted to any activity.

- Athletes who are identified as being affected by the condition of Atlantoaxial Instability are restricted from the following activities:

    - Floor Hockey
    - Equestrian Events
    - Alpine Skiing
    - Gymnastics - tumbling
    - Diving
    - High Jump
    - Dive Starts in Swimming
    - Soccer
    - Butterfly Stroke in Swimming
    - Any warm up exercises involving stress on the head and neck.

Recent research indicates the condition is progressive. Parents/guardians may wish to continue with regular x-rays especially if neurological symptoms occur.

The Special Olympics Manitoba registration form has a section, which is to be filled out by a physician with respect to the Atlantoaxial Instability Examination.

Any coach who experiences difficulty in ensuring that this policy is followed should report it immediately to the Special Olympics Manitoba Office. (Fall NPC, 1990)