



# **AIS HIGH PERFORMANCE PREGNANCY GUIDELINES**

OCTOBER 2021



# CONTENTS

<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>GENERAL POSITION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>DISCRIMINATION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>GRANTS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>GUIDELINES FOR PREGNANT HP ATHLETES</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>GUIDELINES FOR HP COACHES</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>GUIDELINES FOR ADMINISTRATORS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>OTHER MATTERS</b>	<b>5</b>
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	5
DISCLAIMERS	5

## BACKGROUND

The AIS leads a collaborative high performance (HP) system that supports Australian athletes to pursue and achieve podium success.

**Vision:** Australian athletes are able to learn, thrive, and contribute to the community during their time in high performance sport, and in life afterwards.

**Purpose:** To lead and support Australia's sports industry to understand that a successful HP culture includes athletes finding the right balance between wellbeing, engagement in activities outside of training and competition, and the requirements of elite sport.

The wellbeing of athletes is crucial to both individual and overall program success in high performance sport.

Ensuring that an athlete's time in HP is positive is also essential in terms of legacy and engagement, providing a platform for individuals to connect with community and inspire future generations.

**The AIS is committed to providing an inclusive, safe, and enjoyable environment for all stakeholders involved in high performance programs.**

The AIS has developed these guidelines to assist pregnant athletes, athletes planning to become pregnant, and their sports to make safe and informed decisions in relation to HP programs.

- These guidelines are designed to inform athletes and their sport of their obligations around matters such as discrimination and inclusion. **They do not provide specific medical or clinical advice.**
- References to 'pregnant athletes' throughout these guidelines refer to individuals who are either participating, or deciding whether to participate, in sport at HP-level during pregnancy.
- These guidelines provide guidance only for the period during which an individual is pregnant. They do not apply to pre-pregnancy or post-childbirth scenarios.
- The AIS is currently developing detailed clinical advisory positions on women's health topics in HP sport, including pregnancy.
- For further information, refer to [www.ais.gov.au/fphi/education](http://www.ais.gov.au/fphi/education) or contact [femaleperformancehealth@ausport.gov.au](mailto:femaleperformancehealth@ausport.gov.au)

## GENERAL POSITION

Many sporting activities are safe for pregnant individuals to participate in, and there are various health benefits arising from continued exercise during pregnancy.

However, there are also some risks associated with playing sport during pregnancy.

**The AIS encourages all pregnant athletes to seek professional medical advice to educate themselves as to the full range of benefits and risks associated with participating in sport during pregnancy.**

This advice should be uniquely tailored to an athlete's particular circumstances to ensure that decisions taken by the athlete are highly informed.

The AIS advises all pregnant athletes who wish to participate in high performance sport to ensure that their health and wellbeing, and the health and wellbeing of their unborn child, are and remain their utmost priority at all times.

## DISCRIMINATION

In Australia, anti-discrimination legislation exists at both a Commonwealth and State & Territory level. Subject to specific exemptions, this legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of pregnancy (or, in certain jurisdictions, potential pregnancy).

The AIS does not tolerate unlawful discrimination or harassment on the basis of pregnancy under any circumstances.

- The AIS recognises and affirms that every person has a right to fair and respectful involvement in sport, including in high performance sport, and is committed to creating a culture and environment free from discrimination.
- Every person involved in a high performance program is expected to treat pregnant athletes with dignity and respect, and to remove unreasonable barriers to their participation in the sport.

## GRANTS

**Pregnant athletes are encouraged to carefully consider these guidelines when seeking to meet eligibility criteria for a dAIS Grant or any other Grant/funding available to them.**

- The AIS recognise that athletes may take some time away from intense training and competition when they become pregnant or have recently given birth. These athletes may still be on track to contribute to national performance targets at the next pinnacle event.
- It is recommended that athletes who fall into this category should still be identified within the sport specific Athlete Categorisation matrix, and therefore eligible for dAIS nomination, if they meet the following minimum criteria:
  - Prior to becoming pregnant, the athlete was categorised AND was receiving dAIS support in the past 12 months;
  - Has an individual athlete performance plan focusing on maintaining physical and mental wellbeing as it aligns to the sports needs and informed by specific medical advice as it relates to pregnancy;
  - Has an agreed return to sport and competition plan including timeframes and regular pre-determined meetings scheduled with the sport PD (or equivalent); and
  - Maintains contact with AW&E staff (or equivalent) on a regular basis to ensure athletes are focussed on maintaining their overall wellbeing.
- Other matters to consider:
  - Bodies overseeing Grants should consider the eligibility of all athletes, including pregnant athletes, for Grants on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the eligibility criteria for the relevant Grant.
  - If an athlete receives a Grant and subsequently becomes pregnant, the athlete should continue to receive the Grant for the remainder of the period for which the Grant is provided, subject to compliance with any applicable terms and conditions.
  - In circumstances where a pregnant athlete chooses to take time away from sport, an NSO may decide upon the continuation of a Grant, or not, in accordance with its own clearly articulated and published policy position.
- Any athlete contemplating taking time away from a high performance program with a view to returning at a later date is encouraged to discuss with their AW&E Manager how such a hiatus might affect their HP circumstances generally, and their prospects of securing a future Grant in particular.

## GUIDELINES FOR PREGNANT HP ATHLETES

### The AIS encourages and advises pregnant athletes to:

- recognise that their personal health and wellbeing, and that of their unborn child, is of paramount importance when making any decision(s) relating to participation in high performance sport.
- disclose their pregnancy to a/the Designated Person in their high performance program as soon as reasonably practicable, in order that appropriate support and/or guidance can be provided.
- HP programs can support athletes by clearly nominating 'Designated Persons' in appropriate (athlete-facing) policy or information resources. Designated Persons typically include roles such as the AW&E Manager, Chief Medical Officer, and HP Director.
- obtain expert medical advice regarding the risks associated with participation in their HP program. This advice must be tailored to the athlete's unique circumstances
- attend regular and ongoing consultations — including a 'review of participation' in HP — as deemed necessary by their expert medical adviser(s)
- take steps to ensure they fully understand the medical advice provided to them. This may involve asking further questions of their medical adviser(s), or seeking an alternative opinion from a different medical adviser, until such time as the athlete is comfortable that they fully understand the risks involved in participation
- be mindful of the changes to their physical condition and use common sense to avoid taking unnecessary risks; and
- consult closely with their sport if they have any concerns, issues, and/or questions relating either to these guidelines or to their participation in HP generally.

## GUIDELINES FOR HP COACHES

### When coaching a high performance athlete who is pregnant, coaches are advised and encouraged to:

- respect and support the athlete's right to make their own decision(s) in relation to participation (or non-participation) in HP sport
- understand any medical needs or advice relayed by the athlete, and take any necessary step to ensure their actions align with those needs and with that advice; and
- notify, in consultation with the athlete and only with the athlete's express consent, any Relevant Organisation as to the athlete's pregnancy and continuing participation at HP level.
- Any such notification process remains athlete-led at all times.
- HP programs can support coaches and athletes by providing guidance and stipulation notes around all/any 'Relevant Organisations' in appropriate (athlete-facing) policy or information resources.

### In the performance of their professional role, it is essential that HP coaches strictly refrain from, and avoid any appearance of, offering advice of a medical nature to a pregnant athlete. Accordingly, HP coaches are expected to:

- keep at all times within the scope of their technical high performance knowledge when coaching athletes, and
- foster a consultative, collaborative approach that facilitates clear and open communication between themselves, the athlete, and the athlete's expert medical adviser(s).

**Coaches and selectors are advised that the non-selection or de-selection of an athlete based solely upon the fact of pregnancy is contrary to these guidelines and may constitute unlawful discrimination.**

In circumstances where an athlete is not performing at the required level, whether due to the effects of pregnancy or otherwise, non-selection/de-selection may be regarded as valid if based purely on performance standards and measures.

Where expert medical advice informs a sport that it is unsafe for an athlete to participate at HP level based upon the athlete's unique circumstances, the sport may elect not to consider an athlete for selection due to the risks involved and in deference to the sport's duty of care.

## GUIDELINES FOR ADMINISTRATORS

The AIS provides the following guidelines for administrators working within NSOs, and/or within associations, clubs, and/or teams at HP level.

### **Administrators are encouraged to:**

- assess for the precautions that can be taken to avoid harm to athletes, including pregnant athletes, and take necessary steps to implement them
- consult with HP stakeholders [and Relevant Organisations] in the development of protocols & procedures around participation in HP sport during pregnancy
- clearly articulate, for the benefit of HP athletes and stakeholders, processes by which athletes may advise 'Designated Persons' of their pregnancy
- clearly articulate, for the benefit of HP athletes and Designated Persons, the standards of confidentiality that apply when an athlete advises of pregnancy
- promulgate general guidance in relation to pregnancy in sport, including information relating to associated risks and key documentation
- [Note: legal advice as to the form and content of any such material/documentation should be obtained prior to its release]; and
- take steps to ensure that all protocols & procedures, and other regulatory material, is consistent with all and any relevant anti-discrimination legislation.

# OTHER MATTERS

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### IOC Expert Committee Evidence Statement

- Recommendations for health professionals and active individuals
- Summarises the IOC expert committee's recommendations for exercise during pregnancy and after childbirth in recreational exercisers and elite athletes experiencing healthy pregnancies

### Sports Medicine Australia Pregnancy Statement

- Sets out the benefits and risks of exercise during pregnancy
- Addresses issues such as how safe aerobic exercise and resistance (weight) training is, the quantity of exercise and how much is safe, and considerations of the potential benefits and risks associated with exercising during pregnancy

### Sports Medicine Australia Pregnancy and Exercise Fact Sheet

- Addresses benefits and risks relating to pregnancy and exercise
- Recommendations around type, frequency, intensity, and duration of exercise for pregnant athletes who do not experience specific situations whereby exercise may be harmful

## DISCLAIMERS

- The information contained in these guidelines is in the nature of general comment only; it does not constitute advice (legal, medical, or otherwise) on any matter.
- No reader should act on the basis of anything contained in these guidelines without seeking independent professional advice. No responsibility or liability can be accepted by the AIS for any loss, damage, or injury that may arise from any person(s) acting on any statement or information contained in these guidelines, and all such liabilities are expressly disclaimed.
- The AIS affirms that these guidelines do not prejudice or otherwise prevent a pregnant individual from accessing any entitlements under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) or any other applicable discrimination legislation.

Effective Date: 22 April 2021.



[AIS.gov.au](https://ais.gov.au)



@theAIS #theAIS

Leverrier Street Bruce ACT 2617  
PO Box 176 Belconnen ACT 2616  
+61 2 6214 1111