

Clarification About the EPO Detection Method

Following misleading information in the public domain concerning the detection method for EPO and recent cases, WADA wishes to clarify the following:

1. EPO is a performance-enhancing substance that is abused by some athletes to increase their oxygen-carrying capacity. EPO has been banned since the early 1990s. A detection method for EPO in urine was introduced in 2000.
2. The detection method for EPO is valid and reliable. It has undergone an extensive scientific validation process and has been used successfully for many years by many anti-doping laboratories around the world. It is a well-established procedure widely accepted by the scientific community, as demonstrated by publication in a number of international scientific journals. Further, in all its decisions relating to EPO, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) has supported the validity of the EPO detection method. At its meeting of September 26-27, 2005, the WADA Laboratory Committee reiterated its strong support to the method when properly applied.
3. The conservative approach used in the initial phase of implementation of the method has however allowed a large number of EPO abusers to escape detection. Consistent with the advancing science in anti-doping, work is done on an ongoing basis on all detection methods to refine the method and interpretation of results. In the case of EPO, this led, based on expert consensus, to the introduction by WADA of new interpretation criteria for a more discriminant reading of EPO results, in January 2005. At the same time, laboratories were advised to have their adverse EPO results confirmed by another laboratory with extensive experience of the method.

Why have recent cases questioned the validity of the EPO detection method?

A new phenomenon, currently under investigation, has been reported by a few anti-doping laboratories in some rare cases. In rare circumstances, it appears that normally endogenous EPO may shift into the recombinant EPO area. This phenomenon can be clearly identified by laboratories, and is distinguished from profiles revealing EPO due to doping (exogenous EPO). When such a profile is identified, it is not reported as an adverse result.

Is this phenomenon recent?

It was not an issue prior to the introduction of new interpretation criteria in January 2005 because the former interpretation criteria were not as discriminant and these profiles would never have been reported as adverse results. WADA was fully informed of this phenomenon by a few accredited laboratories in the spring of 2005.

What is WADA doing about it?

Following review of this information, WADA contacted all accredited laboratories performing EPO analysis in July 2005 to inform them of the phenomenon to ensure that they integrate



this information in their interpretation. Laboratories have also been advised that a second independent opinion is now mandatory before reporting any adverse result. Therefore, there is still no risk of false positives. All accredited laboratories are in a position to distinguish between this profile and exogenous EPO.

At the same time, WADA initiated further research with anti-doping laboratories to better understand the origin of this phenomenon and to more easily predict its occurrence. WADA expects the conclusion of the research project soon.

Could there have been false positives between January 2005 (when WADA introduced new interpretation criteria of EPO results) and July 2005 (when WADA contacted all accredited laboratories performing EPO analysis to inform them of the phenomenon)?

When WADA contacted the laboratories in July 2005, the Agency asked laboratory directors whether they had previously noticed similar profiles.

Several laboratories were aware of this phenomenon and had already incorporated it in their routine procedure for the reading of EPO results. Others undertook to review cases they may have had in the past six months. This therefore gives the Agency full confidence that there have been no sanctions of athletes due to such profile.

Is WADA going to change its interpretation criteria of EPO results?

Based on the ongoing research project on this phenomenon, the precautions that WADA has asked the accredited laboratories to take may be formalized in the document explaining the interpretation criteria of EPO results.