

Montreal, 6 November 2020

Strategic Testing Expert Group Meetings “Impact of COVID-19 on Global Testing Programs”

Summary of Outcomes and Recommendations

Dear Colleagues,

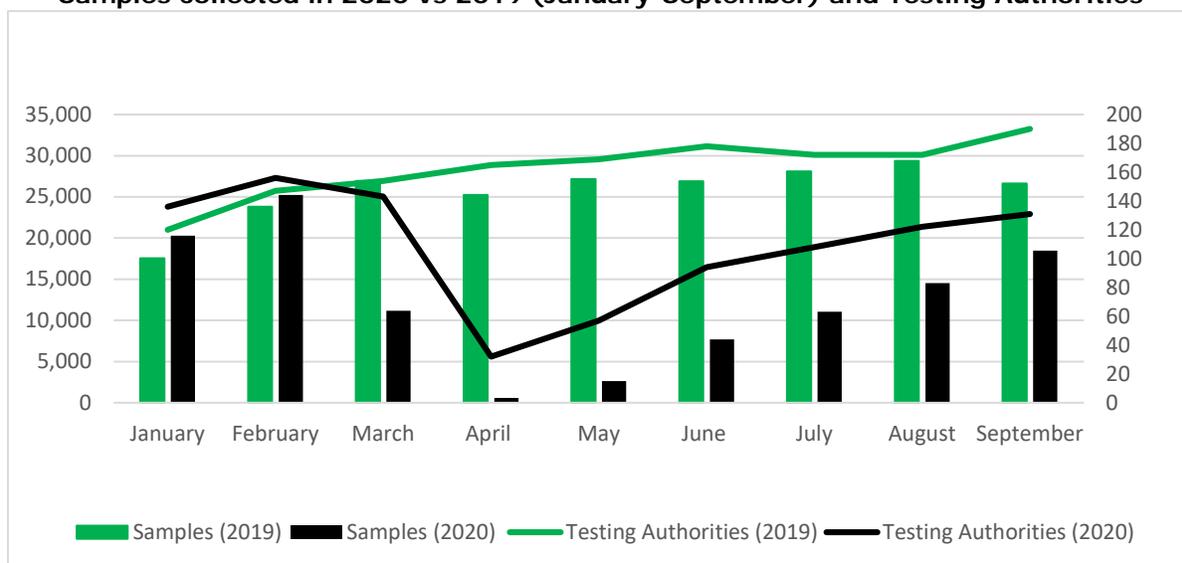
The World Anti-Doping Agency’s (WADA’s) [Strategic Testing Expert Group \(EG\)](#) met virtually on 5, 8, 15 and 21 October 2020.¹

The EG focused its discussions on the short- and potential long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on global testing programs and evaluated how the anti-doping community can improve the ways in which it plans, collects and analyzes samples for the purpose of maximizing both detection efficiency and effectiveness, maintaining a deterrence whilst maintaining the safety and health of both the athlete and sample collection personnel as the highest priority.

Impact on Number of Samples Collected During Pandemic

The EG reviewed global testing statistics between March and September 2020 across the world and noted the diverse and widespread impact of the pandemic on sample collection programs of the anti-doping community.

Samples collected in 2020 vs 2019 (January-September) and Testing Authorities



¹ In addition to the EG meeting held on 16 September 2020 on the Technical Document for Sport Specific Analysis (TDSSA), for which the [outcomes and recommendations](#) were published by WADA on 8 October 2020.

The impact of the pandemic on global testing programs is clearly reflected in the above graph by the sudden drop of samples collected in March 2020 and in particular April 2020. WADA's *COVID-19 ADO Guidance for Resuming Testing* document was published on 6 May 2020 to assist Anti-Doping Organizations (ADOs) plan to resume their testing programs as countries started to de-confine. Since May, there has been a steady increase in the number of samples collected and the number of Testing Authorities. In September 2020, around 18,000 samples were collected. While some ADOs and regions are back to near-normal levels of testing, others remain severely impacted. In times of a pandemic, it is important that ADOs continue to communicate and collaborate closely together to understand the status of the pandemic as well as the restrictions put in place in each country and to maximize available resources when planning and conducting testing.

Impact on Athletes

Ben Sandford, the Chair of the WADA Athlete Committee and a member of the EG, presented his athlete perspective of the pandemic, noting the continued need for robust anti-doping programs and effective detection and deterrence, while applying as many safeguards as possible to protect athlete health and safety, and maintain sample collection capacity. Importantly, athlete physical and mental health is also impacted by changes to competition schedules, the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and access to training facilities. The WADA Athlete Committee developed and published a [Question and Answer](#) document to assist athletes in understanding the measures that were put in place to ensure testing could resume in a safe and healthy way and as quickly as possible as countries started to ease restrictions. It was also important for athletes to get to know the protocols and requirements that, when combined with additional sample collection safeguards, allow for manageable risk mitigation during in- and out-of-competition testing. The EG recognized the key challenge of balancing testing robustness with health and safety.

Impact on WADA-Accredited Laboratories

The EG received updates from both the WADA Medical and Science teams on the pandemic and the effects on the WADA-accredited laboratory system, noting that impact on the laboratories varied from short- to long-term closures and reallocation of staff to public health duties. Further impacts were reported on laboratory operations such as receipt of samples, sample processing times and potential difficulties around B-sample analysis procedures when athletes or their representatives were unable to access the WADA-accredited laboratory that was responsible for conducting the analysis of the B-sample. Strategies for dealing with these various situations will be included within the revised *Guidance for Testing during COVID-19* document mentioned later in this report.

Sample Collection Strategies

Five National Anti-Doping Organizations (NADOs), from China (CHINADA), Denmark (Anti-Doping Denmark), Netherlands (Doping Authority Netherlands), Norway (Anti-Doping Norway), and the USA (USADA) gave detailed presentations on the alternative sample collection strategies they developed and piloted during the pandemic. A brief summary of these strategies is outlined below.

- **CHINADA** – Early in the pandemic, Doping Control Officers (DCOs) were tested for COVID-19, placed in quarantine and temporarily housed within athlete training centers, which enabled them to collect samples from elite athletes who were living within these training centers, in accordance with the International Standard for Testing and Investigations (ISTI) and Doping Control Guideline during the epidemic prevention and control period issued by CHINADA.

- **Doping Authority Netherlands** – The DCO notified athletes in person at their home, provided all disinfected equipment and connected the athlete to a video call via a tablet to assist the athlete in completing the sample collection and sealing process using a paperless doping control form. The athlete was coached by the DCO to do an inspection of the sample provision area (e.g. toilet area) with the camera prior to the camera being placed outside facing the toilet door and the athlete providing their sample unwitnessed using uniquely labeled equipment. Measurement of sample temperature was recorded. When the athlete had completed the sealing of their sample, they returned their sealed A and B kits and other equipment disinfected to the DCO who was waiting outside. The Netherlands NADO also had a mobile doping control station similar to Anti-Doping Norway below which could be used as well rather than use the virtual collection process based on the outcome of the athlete health questionnaire.
- **Anti-Doping Denmark** – The DCO notified athletes in person at their home, and provided the athlete with all equipment and information on how to complete the sample collection and sealing process. The DCO remained outside the athlete's home but was available by mobile phone to assist/instruct the athlete through the procedure. When the athlete had completed the process, they returned their sealed A and B kits and other equipment to the DCO who was waiting outside. DNA analysis and measurement of sample and room temperature were put in place to mitigate the absence of witnessing of the athlete providing the sample. Samples were collected from Registered Testing Pool athletes who already had a sample in long-term storage which enabled DNA comparison.
- **Anti-Doping Norway** – Anti-Doping Norway established a mobile doping control station within a large motor home that was modified to ensure physical distancing could be maintained and to ensure that all surfaces the athlete came in contact with during the sample collection and sealing process are clean and disinfected both before and after every athlete was tested. The athlete was notified at their home or training location, and the sample collection and sealing process were conducted within the motor home in accordance with the ISTI.
- **USADA** – This virtual sample collection program involved elite Olympic and Paralympic athletes who volunteered to be part of the pilot program. The athlete received the urine and blood sample collection equipment in the post/courier in advance and an unannounced video call was made by a DCO. The DCO instructed the athlete through the process using a paperless doping control form. The athlete was asked to conduct an inspection of the toilet area with the camera prior to the live camera being placed outside the toilet door and the athlete providing the urine sample unwitnessed. Measurement of urine sample temperature was recorded using a monitoring strip placed on the sample collection cup. The time for urine provision was also recorded. The collection of blood via newly developed collection equipment was trialed as part of the Dried Blood Spot (DBS) research with the athlete responsible to attach the DBS collection device to their upper arm under the guidance of the DCO on the video call and self-administered the collection. When the athlete had completed the sealing of their samples, they securely packaged them to be collected by a courier and the package was then shipped directly to a WADA-accredited laboratory.

Whilst the EG congratulated each of the above five NADOs on their innovative programs, some of these strategies require further investigation to determine their long-term feasibility based on the departures from current sample collection procedures within the ISTI (in particular the non-witnessing of the provision of the athletes sample) to ensure the athlete's sample and the sample collection process are fully protected against manipulation and tampering. Further review is also continuing for alternative and complementary sample collection matrices, including implementation of [DBS](#).

In the long-term, the EG will prepare recommendations after further analysis of potential alternative sample collection strategies such as virtual collections, unobserved collections taking into account a detailed set of considerations such as athlete privacy, technological advancements and limitations, policy and procedure revisions, athlete selection criteria, sample shipping and logistics.

The EG also noted the parallel work of existing expert groups to advance the implementation of new collection matrices such as DBS as soon as possible and prior to the Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in February 2022.

WADA Survey on Impact of COVID-19 on ADOs

The survey findings² outlined that testing was the area most impacted by the pandemic, followed by education and the general administration of ADOs' operations. Of the 120 ADOs that responded, 95% said that they found the *COVID-19 ADO Guidance for Resuming Testing* document somewhat useful, useful or highly useful, and 80% of the respondents implemented its recommendations in full.

Using the feedback from the extensive WADA ADO survey, the EG is in the process of updating the *COVID-19 ADO Guidance for Resuming Testing* that was issued in May 2020 and will be renamed the *Guidance for Testing During COVID-19* to reflect the continued evolution of the pandemic.

Guidance for Testing During COVID-19 Document

This document continues to emphasize the need to adhere to the restrictions in place and any advice given by governmental and health authorities specific to each country and local authorities before conducting testing. It also recognizes the risks and challenges that are associated with the sample collection procedures that are required in the face of COVID-19. The ongoing revision of this document includes the following elements:

- Guidance for sample collection personnel to conduct successful in-competition testing in collaboration with event organizers;
- Further guidance with regards to out-of-competition testing;
- Prioritizing the testing of athletes aiming to qualify or that have qualified for Major Events such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games and World Championships, in particular where ADOs are facing limitations or restrictions with the implementation of their testing program;
- Updates on health and safety measures to conduct doping control; and
- Guidance for placing an emphasis on further analysis programs from long-term storage of samples and advice in handling unique situations arising from the pandemic.

Besides input from WADA and the EG, the document will also be shared with a global group of NADOs and the World Health Organization for their feedback. The updated guidance document is being prepared for release in late November 2020 and will be published in English and French. The EG acknowledged that the document needs to remain dynamic and, depending on the evolution of the pandemic, further updates may be required in early 2021.

We hope you find the above update informative. Should you have any comments or questions regarding the above, we invite you to contact WADA at SandH@wada-ama.org.

² A detailed report on the outcomes of the WADA survey will be shared with ADOs in November 2020.



Thank you for your continued commitment to clean sport.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Fedoruk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "M" and "F".

Matt Fedoruk
Chair of the Strategic Testing Expert Group

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Ricketts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "T" and "R".

Tim Ricketts
Director, Standards and Harmonization