

Raising awareness of Hyponatraemia (Water Intoxication) following Doping Control Sample Collection

Hyponatraemia is a very rare but potentially serious medical condition (sometimes referred to as water intoxication). Hyponatraemia occurs when the concentration of sodium in the blood becomes abnormally low, often as a result of excessive fluid intake over a relatively short period of time. Symptoms of hyponatraemia can range from mild to severe and may include:

- headache
- nausea and vomiting
- dizziness
- confusion or altered mental state
- fatigue
- muscle cramps
- seizures
- loss of consciousness in severe cases

We are aware that there is a risk that some athletes may choose to intake a large amount of fluids prior to providing a urine sample. We therefore wish to bring this condition to your attention.

In the context of doping control process specifically, athletes are informed not to overhydrate to enable them to provide a urine sample that meets the requirements for analysis (i.e., a urine sample that is not too dilute). UKAD does not however, supervise an athlete's fluid intake before, during or after sample collection and is therefore not able to oversee individual hydration decisions. Responsibility for an athlete's hydration, medical care and welfare remains with the athlete, their support personnel, medical practitioners and relevant sport organisations, as appropriate.

We emphasise that the risk of hyponatraemia following the doping control process is exceptionally rare. The purpose of this communication is to promote athlete welfare and awareness and prevention of the condition, rather than cause concern. We wish to make national governing bodies aware of the condition and encourage collective consideration of measures that may help minimise the risk of occurrence.

We therefore encourage you to consider whether any of the following actions should be taken within your sport:

- Raise awareness amongst athletes and athlete support personnel of the risks associated with excessive water consumption over a short period of time.

- Consider whether athletes and athlete support personnel should be made aware of the signs and symptoms of hyponatraemia and how to seek appropriate medical attention where concerns arise.
- Remind athletes that they should avoid overhydrating before, during and after the doping control process, as this could put an athlete at risk of hyponatraemia.
- Remind athletes that they should not overhydrate during the doping control process, as this does not necessarily speed the process up, and instead could lead to the provision of unsuitable, dilute samples and therefore may require the athlete to provide further urine samples, thus making the process longer.
- Provide advice to athletes and athlete support personnel that athletes, where possible, may wish to have a representative with them throughout the doping control process.
- Provide advice to athletes and athlete support personnel that athletes should make their own informed decisions regarding hydration. During the sample collection process, athletes are not restricted to consuming water only, and can choose to intake other fluids, for example, isotonic drinks.
- Consider whether athlete education materials, event briefings or competition guidance should include reference to the risks of excessive fluid intake.

Separately, UKAD is in the process of implementing the following measures to also raise awareness:

- Informing UKAD Doping Control Personnel and National Trainers of hyponatraemia and the risk of occurrence during and following doping control.
- Reasserting to UKAD Doping Control Personnel the need to remind athletes not to overhydrate during the doping control process to minimise the risk of an athlete providing an unsuitable, dilute urine sample.
- Updating our UKAD education resources to raise awareness of the risk of excessive fluid consumption.

We would be grateful if you could share this information, as appropriate, with athletes, athlete support personnel, medical teams and other relevant stakeholders within your sport.