

# Preventing doping means protecting sport: education, technology, and shared responsibility

## *Prevenir el dopaje es proteger el deporte: educación, tecnología y responsabilidad compartida*

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Doping continues to be one of the most persistent and complex threats in the world of sport. Its impact is felt far beyond the effects on a personal level: it harms the health of athletes, it distorts results, it erodes public confidence and it compromises the values that make sport the finest example of a fair society.

Today more than ever, we know that the fight against doping not only means detecting and penalising adverse results. Above all, it means preventing doping in the first place. It requires anticipating, educating, accompanying, informing and giving athletes all the necessary tools for choosing the right path.

The main pillars for the prevention of doping in athletes include those described below.

### Education as the fundamental priority

Prevention starts with knowledge. Educating athletes from an early age, as well as the people around them (doctors, coaches, physiotherapists, nutritionists and other support staff), is key to preventing involuntary mistakes and reinforcing an anti-doping culture based on fair play and conscientious decision-making<sup>1</sup>.

Face-to-face training continues to be essential. Direct interaction allows trust to be built, specific questions to be answered and work to be done on real practical cases. These meetings strengthen the relationship between anti-doping authorities and the sports community.

At the same time, online courses taught via the Virtual Classroom<sup>2</sup> have shown themselves to be effective and scalable tools. They make it easier for content to be spread nationwide, with no geographical or logistical restrictions, and ensure that the knowledge is accessible and up-to-date.

### Immersive technology: virtual reality supporting fair play

Innovation in teaching methods is just as important as innovation in content, as well as adaptation to younger generations. To that end, the incorporation of such tools as virtual reality represents a genuine leap forward in quality.

Nowadays, it is possible to conduct a doping control simulation in an immersive virtual environment<sup>3,4</sup>, which realistically recreates the entire procedure. This experience helps athletes to understand their rights and obligations, reduces anxiety about these procedures and strengthens confidence in the system.

This learning process ensures that athletes can acquaint themselves with the doping control process by experiencing it first-hand.

### Pertinent information: communicate to prevent

Prevention also requires a clear and effective communication strategy. Wrong decisions can be made due to a lack of knowledge or information at the pertinent time.

With that in mind, the direct delivery of alerts, warnings and updates on information relevant to athletes (by e-mail, social media, etc.) is a highly impactful tool. Providing information about changes to the list of banned substances and methods, alerts about the contamination of medicines or food supplements, or the existence of new regulations can allow mistakes to be avoided and responsible decisions to be encouraged.

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In turn, the indirect work carried out by National Sports Federations across Spain is essential to guaranteeing the widespread and consistent communication of messages. When sports institutions take on an active role in prevention, a coherent ecosystem is created that protects the athlete.

## Practical tools: preventing with a click

The everyday decisions made by an athlete often happen away from a clinical or sports setting. Having accessible and reliable digital tools is therefore fundamental to helping them maintain their health and performance.

In this regard, NØDopApp and its web version, NØDopWeb<sup>5</sup>, represent a resource of enormous value. These platforms allow people to quickly check whether a medicine is banned, allowed or restricted based on the situation (in or out of competition). Its use not only prevents accidental mistakes but also encourages informed independence among athletes and strengthens shared responsibility in the fight against doping.

These tools are constantly being updated and have been developed to serve practical purposes. Every query becomes a prevention opportunity.

## Prevention is a shared responsibility

The fight against doping requires action in places the authorities cannot reach. Doping cannot be eradicated from an office desk. The

battles are fought in the changing rooms, in the doctor's office, in the classroom, on the ground and in the digital environment where athletes access information, who are increasingly more accustomed to the online world.

The prevention of doping is neither an isolated action nor an accessory to standard controls: it is the foundations on which honest and safe sport should be built. It requires commitment, investment and long-term vision. However, above all, it requires conviction: believing it is possible to train generations of athletes who compete with excellence and without cheating.

Investing in prevention, education, technology and communication means investing in the future of sport.

Let's protect our athletes. Let's protect our sports.

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