
Request for advice

Date of request: 23 April 2008

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I hereby request that you initiate a study into the harmful effects of doping use on health and advise me on this subject.

Reports from the former Netherlands Centre for Doping Issues (NeCeDo) and the subsequently founded Doping Authority in the past years have indicated that doping in sports is likely to be a growing problem in our country. Research figures indicate that about 50,000 people use doping each year.

In addition to organised sports (both professional and amateur), doping use is apparently most prevalent in unorganised sports. In this context, doping may be described as unintended use of authorised or unauthorised medicines in order to obtain a muscular or slim appearance. This includes the use of anabolic steroids, growth hormone, EPO, insulin, thyroid hormone, amphetamines and various other substances. Some athletes also reach out to veterinary medicines such as clenbuterol.

The use of anabolic steroids and stimulants by sport school and fitness centre attendees is particularly worrying. Various descriptions of disease cases in medical literature show that athletes run serious health risks in both short and long term when using doping substances. The health harm may be

caused by (side) effects of the substance itself, the method of use (for example, combined with other medicines), and/or the poor quality of the substances.

Better insight into the nature and extent of the problem, particularly with regard to the chances of severe long-term consequences of using doping substances, is of major importance in evaluating current anti-doping policy, and may provide handholds for adjusting preventive measures in the field, such as targeted awareness-raising.

Given the above, I request that you advise me on the current state of knowledge, paying specific attention to the following points:

- 1 Which medical, short-term or long-term complaints may develop in athletes using the doping substances referred to? Which substances represent the greatest risks?
- 2 Can you outline the implications of using these high-risk substances in terms of health risk, disease burden and use of health services (care consumption)?
- 3 Do existing health monitors provide sufficient insight into the degree in which use of the substances described leads to medical complaints?
- 4 Given the current state of the field, what is your view regarding improving preventing said health harm?
- 5 In the event important data is lacking, what are your recommendations regarding further research, as well as involving other new forms of doping (such as gene doping)?

The study is already part of the proposed 2008 working programme (paragraph 3.9) of the Health Council of the Netherlands, defined on 18 September 2007.

I look forward to receiving your advisory report in the spring of 2009 at the latest.

(signed)

The Minister for Health, Welfare and Sport

Dr A. Klink