

Summary of changes to the 2027 Sports Anti-Doping Rules

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Important notice

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Part 1: Background to the 2027 Sports Anti-Doping Rules

Anti-doping rules keep sport clean

Aotearoa New Zealand is known internationally for clean, fair sport. It's important that we maintain and build on this reputation in our efforts to fight doping. A key part of this is having a clear and coherent set of anti-doping rules that focus on fairness and athlete wellbeing.

Anti-doping rules help keep competitive sport clean and fair. They aim to make sure that all athletes compete on a level playing field, protecting fairness, athlete health and the spirit of competition. Applied consistently and effectively, they give fans and athletes confidence in sporting competitions.

Based on the World Anti-Doping Code

New Zealand's Sports Anti-Doping Rules are based on the World Anti-Doping Code (the Code).

The Code harmonises anti-doping across sports and countries worldwide. Countries like New Zealand sign up to the Code to make sure that competitions are fair, clean and subject to consistent rules and processes.

The Code provides the legal framework for anti-doping in New Zealand, directing how anti-doping education, testing, privacy and results management must be implemented.

As a signatory to the Code, New Zealand is legally required to have Sports Anti-Doping Rules. They are secondary legislation and give effect to the Code in our country. The Sports Anti-Doping Rules are updated each year and must reflect the latest version of the Code.

Code updated for 2027

The Code and International Standards are substantively updated every six years. The most recent update has just been completed to form the 2027 Code and 2027 International Standards.

The 2027 Code and International Standard update process started in September 2023. It was structured by WADA to offer stakeholders multiple opportunities to provide feedback on successive working drafts of the documents.

The Commission worked with various New Zealand stakeholders, including athletes, National Sport Organisations, Sport NZ, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and the Sports Tribunal, to provide detailed feedback to WADA at each stage.

This process culminated in the approval of the final versions of the 2027 Code and International Standards by the WADA Foundation Board and Executive Committee at the Sixth World Conference on Doping in Sport, in Busan, South Korea in December 2025. They come onto effect on 1 January 2027.

Stronger human rights focus

The changes to the Code merge human rights and an athlete centred approach as its core framework. The updated Code introduces changes designed to balance rigorous testing with fundamental human rights, for example:

- additional procedural fairness
- data protection
- athlete welfare reforms.

This change in emphasis was in response to perceived unfairness to athletes. It aims to make sure that those impacted by Sports Anti-Doping Rules have adequate opportunities to protect their rights. At a high level, it also seeks to make sure that those who enforce the Code can take into account more situations and circumstances, so that sanctions are now more appropriately tailored to the nature and extent of breaches of the Code rather than taking a one size fits all approach.

[Read the 2027 Sports Anti-Doping Rules](#)

Part 2: Summary of key changes in the 2027 Rules

The 2027 Code has 3,400 individual edits that contain all the final changes from the 2021 Code. If you're interested in reading these changes in full, you can access the red-lined version of the 2027 Code, and WADA's summary of those edits, via the links below.

[See the full 2027 Code edits \(wada.ama\)](#)

[Read WADA's summary of the major changes \(wada.ama\)](#)

We have written our own summary of the changes, which is grouped by theme and outlined below. You can find a brief, plain language overview on our blog via the link below.

[See what changes to the 2027 Sports Anti-Doping Rules mean for athletes.](#)

New sanctioning approach

Tiered sanctions for non-Specified Substances

One of the most significant changes is intended to address the issue of proportionality in sanctions. The 2027 Sports Anti-Doping Rules (2027 Rules) introduce a new tiered sanctioning structure in Article 10.2.1 for Presence and Use violations involving non-Specified Substances (substances that are less likely to be used inadvertently and are more typically associated with intentional doping) based on an Athlete's intent:

- a. Intentional doping will continue to result in a four-year period of Ineligibility. The 2027 Rules provide for a reduced two-year period of Ineligibility if an Athlete can establish how the Prohibited Substance entered their system and that the violation was not intentional. Further substantial reductions may also be available under Article 10.6.1 or 10.6.2 if the Athlete can show that in addition to there being no intent, there was also No Significant Fault or Negligence.
- b. If the Athlete cannot establish that their use of a Prohibited Substance was unintentional but can establish (i) how the Prohibited Substance entered their system and (ii) that the context of ingestion or use was unrelated to sports performance, a three-year period of Ineligibility applies.
- c. If an Athlete cannot establish how the Prohibited Substance entered their system, the period of Ineligibility may still be reduced to two years if they can establish, based on reliable scientific evidence, that the anti-doping rule violation was not compatible with the intentional Use of a Prohibited Substance. However, this exception will only apply in exceptional cases and is described in the comment to Article 10.2.1.3 as the "narrowest of corridors".

These changes are intended to provide a more flexible sanctions framework than the current system.

Substances of Abuse: Rehabilitation over punishment

Adopting a welfare-focused approach, the 2027 Rules are intended to recognise that substance abuse is in part a health issue requiring treatment rather than purely punitive measures.

Under Article 10.2.3, first-time violations for Substances of Abuse (such as cocaine and ecstasy) detected Out-of-Competition that are unrelated to sport performance now carry a fixed period of Ineligibility of two months (down from three months), with a second violation resulting in a four-month period of Ineligibility, which can be reduced to two months if the Athlete enters an approved Substance of Abuse treatment programme.

It is also possible to impose the reduced two-month period of Ineligibility if it is determined that a treatment programme is not necessary, for example (as explicitly stated in the 2027 Code) in cases of coca tea ingestion.

If ingestion of the Substance of Abuse incurred In-Competition and has been established to be unrelated to sport performance, the period of Ineligibility will be fixed between six months and two years, depending on the circumstances of the case.

In addition, a mandatory provisional suspension is no longer required for Substances of Abuse that are not categorised as Specified Substances.

These changes are intended to allow a more proportionate response to the use of Substances of Abuse.

New mitigations available to Athletes

Expanded framework for sources of contamination

The 2027 Sports Anti-Doping Rules acknowledge the various ways in which Athletes can be inadvertently exposed to Prohibited Substances and expands the definition of "Contaminated Products" to "Contaminated Source".

The new "Contaminated Source" definition is broader and includes sources of contamination such as food or drink, environmental contamination, or exposure through contact with a third person or object touched by a third person. The definition of Contaminated Source has been further clarified to provide that in contamination through physical contact cases, there must have been no basis for the Athlete to suspect that the third person who contaminated them have used or possessed or been exposed to the Prohibited Substance.

This change is intended to provide more flexibility to hearing panels when sanctioning cases of inadvertent contamination.

Retroactive Therapeutic Use Exemptions (TUEs)

Article 10.2.4 of the 2027 Rules introduces a fixed two-month period of Ineligibility if an Athlete can establish that their use of a Prohibited Substance or Method would have met the TUE criteria under the International Standard for Therapeutic Use Exemptions.

In doing so, this provision permits more leniency in cases where an Athlete had legitimate medical grounds for their Use of a Prohibited Substance or Prohibited Method but failed to obtain the required authorisation before competition and sample collection. Instead of applying the typical analysis that may lead to a longer ban (i.e., analysis of intent and degree of fault), an Athlete will now receive a fixed two-month period of Ineligibility in qualifying cases.

This change is focused on taking into account situations where the failure by the athlete is procedural rather than substantive.

Expanded Substantial Assistance provisions

Article 10.7 of the 2027 Rules introduces more flexible criteria for cooperation-based eliminations, reductions, or suspensions of a period of Ineligibility. Specifically, the 2027 Rules remove the requirement that Substantial Assistance result in a prosecution, sanction, or formal outcome, and instead requires only that the Commission "discovers facts constituting" an ADRV committed by a third party. In other words, if the Athlete can meaningfully assist the National Anti-Doping Organisation in a Results Management process against someone else, a reduction for Substantial Assistance may be considered.

In addition, Article 10.7.4 introduces a new, smaller reduction of 15% for individuals who provide valuable information that does not qualify as Substantial Assistance. This would include the scenario where an Athlete provides information on how they

have doped and avoided detection, but without identifying any third-party with culpability. This change is intended to encourage cooperation with NADOs which should in turn lead to more effective and efficient Results Management processes.

Early admission and acceptance of sanction

The 2027 Rules retain the one-year reduction for bans of four years or more but expands the options available to Athletes by providing a 25% reduction for early admission and acceptance of sanction where the period of Ineligibility is less than four years (Article 10.7.2). The reduction is calculated from the period of Ineligibility stated in the notification letter, and to qualify the Athlete must admit the violation and accept all asserted consequences within 20 days of the charge letter. This is intended to encourage early resolution and reduce the administrative burden on the system where liability is clear.

Governance changes

Independent review expert

Responding to governance concerns and recommendations for stronger checks and balances in the anti-doping system, the 2027 Rules formally introduce the role of an Independent Review Expert (IRE) for neutral oversight in certain anti-doping cases (Article 7.8).

A written opinion of the IRE is required in the rare cases where the NADO might consider a departure from the normal results management processes (including by not proceeding with a case) after it has received notice of an Adverse Analytical Finding (AAF) and has completed its initial review of the matter. This opinion must be obtained before the NADO decides not to move forward with the normal results management process or with the AAF.

The Commission does not anticipate relying on this provision and we expect its use globally to be very rare.

NADO Operational Independence

NADOs are required to be independent from sport and government in their operational decisions and activities. The 2027 Rules adds a new definition of "NADO Operational Independence" which further clarifies that requirement, including by referring to activities which may not have previously been prohibited or which were overlooked including, for example, prohibiting the delegation of any Doping Control responsibility to a sport organisation or governing body.

Athlete protection and privacy

Enhanced human rights protections

The 2027 Rules place greater emphasis on human rights, incorporating recommendations from WADA's education and ethics team, including explicit language about Athletes' right to education.

Enhanced protections for Minors

The 2027 Rules also attempt to strengthen protections for young athletes, reflecting considerable feedback from submitters on the 2027 Code about the unique vulnerabilities faced by young athletes and the need for enhanced safeguards in their treatment within the anti-doping system.

Protections are expanded for Minors not formally classified as Protected Persons, offering them certain procedural and sanction-related modifications. For example, under Article 14.3.7, mandatory Public Disclosure under Article 14.3.2 of certain details relating to an ADRV no longer applies to Minors (or Recreational Athletes or Protected Persons).

In addition, breaches of the Code which impact on minors are now treated more seriously. For example, violations of Article 2.7 (Trafficking), 2.8 (Administration) or 2.9 (Complicity) involving Protected Persons or Minors will now likely lead to longer periods of Ineligibility. (Articles 13.3.3 and 13.3.4).

Athlete Support Personnel

The 2027 Code also holds Athlete Support Personnel (including coaches, trainers and medical staff) more accountable for educating and protecting young athletes (see, for example, Article 21.2.2) and enforces tighter procedures by automatically requiring investigations into Athlete Support Personnel in cases of ADRVs committed by Protected Persons or Minors (see Article 20.1.10).

Data protection

The 2027 Rules contain further safeguards regarding Athlete privacy and data protection.

For example, Article 14.3.4 provides that, where it has been determined after a hearing and an appeal that an Athlete (a) did not commit an ADRV or (b) has established that they bear No Fault or Negligence for a violation, the Athlete's consent to publication is required unless (i) the identity of the Athlete is already public, (ii) consequences have been or are being imposed, or (iii) there are other compelling circumstances supporting public disclosure.

In the interests of transparency, Article 14.4 requires an NADO to annually publish a statistical report (maintaining the anonymity of Athletes and other Persons involved) listing decisions that involved a No Fault or Negligence finding, and including the year of the decision, the sport involved, the Code Article violated, the Prohibited Substance or Prohibited Method involved, and whether the decision was appealed.

Technical and administrative clarifications

Sample analysis and research

The 2027 Rules (together with the updated International Standards) clarify how samples and data can be used for scientific research, especially once their original testing purpose (anti-doping control) is finished. Laboratories and NADOs can analyse samples and data for a defined list of "anti-doping purposes" but only if that data is fully anonymised.

In certain circumstances, for example where additional analysis is conducted between charging and case completion (i.e., prior to or during results management), Athlete consent (or Sports Tribunal approval) is required.

The scope of the prohibition against participation while suspended

The 2027 Code clarifies what Athletes can and cannot do while Provisionally Suspended or subject to a period of Ineligibility. Article 10.14.1 makes clear that during any period of Ineligibility or Provisional Suspension, a sanctioned individual is prohibited from participating in any capacity in Competitions or activities authorised or organised by Signatories to the Code, their member organisations, or clubs.

Commentary to the 2027 Rules has been added to define "activity" in this context as including "all competitive training and administrative functions, as well as social functions where the Person has a formal or official role, or receives recognition, authorised or organised by the referenced organisations".