Researchers Examine Respiratory Health Issues in Olympic Athletes

Asthma is the most prevalent chronic medical condition in endurance athletes

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DENVER — With the 2024 summer Olympic games beginning this month, doctors who care for athletes, including Olympians, are examining the unique health issues high-performing athletes must face, particularly asthma and other respiratory conditions. Their research and expertise is a key part of the mission of the International Olympic Committee Medical and Scientific Commission (IOC-MSC) and is highlighted in an opinion piece, published in the July issue of *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*.

J. Tod Olin, MD, a pulmonologist specializing in exercise medicine at National Jewish Health and senior author on the report, went to the Tokyo Olympic Games as part of the COVID mitigation team and will be a faculty member of the first IOC Course on Respiratory Care of Olympic Athletes. He says that roughly one quarter of athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic level have asthma.

“This is something to think about with athletes and, by extension, anyone you know who likes to run, swim and exercise strenuously who is having trouble,” says Dr. Olin. “If you or someone you know is struggling to breathe while working out, a lung function test should be scheduled after discussing the issue with a doctor.”

The IOC-MSC recently identified respiratory health as an important issue for athletes. Respiratory symptoms, such as wheezing, coughing and breathlessness are identified as the most common symptoms reported by athletic individuals, and those can be heightened when exercise is performed in environments like Paris, with poor air quality.

In their opinion piece, the committee explains that these issues are a major burden and significantly affect athlete health; therefore, more resources should be used to evaluate this population.
According to Dr. Olin, not everyone who has trouble breathing has asthma. Many get diagnosed with exercise-induced laryngeal obstruction (EILO), a breathing condition that causes the larynx to narrow during exercise, or breathing pattern disorder, a condition that often causes shortness of breath both at rest and during exercise.

The team at the National Jewish Health Exercise and Performance Breathing Center can be contacted for questions about evaluating these conditions in athletes at nationaljewish.org/directory/elo-vcd.

**National Jewish Health** is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 125 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of children and adults with respiratory, cardiac, immune, and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit the media resources page.

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We have many faculty members, from bench scientists to clinicians, who can speak on almost any aspect of respiratory, immune, cardiac and gastrointestinal disease as well as lung cancer and basic immunology.

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Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

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