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## Armstrong Team Probe May Get Boost From Researchers' Transfused Blood Test

By Alex Duff - Jan 13, 2011 12:03 AM GMT+0100

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Scientists are working on a doping test for transfused blood that may help a probe into allegations that the U.S. Postal cycling team led by [Lance Armstrong](#) used the technique to improve riders' performances.

Jordi Segura, head of a Barcelona laboratory accredited by the [World Anti-Doping Agency](#), was among 12 researchers to publish a joint study last month that found the concentration of residue from a plasticizer called DEHP "significantly" differs in a person's urine after a transfusion. In an interview, Segura said he's leading research to validate a test for the compound, which is used to make blood bags pliable.

A verified test can be used to pursue doping violations in samples dating back eight years under WADA rules. [Floyd Landis](#), stripped of the 2006 [Tour de France](#) for doping, wrote in an e-mail to cycling officials last May that the "entire" U.S. Postal team had transfusions on a bus in 2004. Armstrong and other team members deny there was any doping on the team, saying Landis isn't a credible witness.

"Potentially it has all the hallmarks of a really groundbreaking test," said Robin Parisotto, a scientist who helped introduce the first doping test for erythropoietin, or EPO, in 2000. "There is no scientific reason why it can't be used in retrospective testing."

The study was published in *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry* journal.

Reinfusing blood can increase stamina by boosting the volume of oxygen-carrying red blood cells in an athlete's body. An anti-doping test for transfusions currently only exists for cases using someone else's blood.

### Police Raids

There is evidence of blood-doping in cycling and skiing among other sports. In "Operacion Puerto," Spanish police in 2006 uncovered transfusion paraphernalia and dozens of blood bags that they said showed as many as 58 cyclists were infusing their own blood. Four riders linked to the scandal received doping bans. Also that year Italian police seized blood bags at the Turin Winter [Olympic Games](#) that resulted in lifetime bans for three Austrian cross-country skiers.

Landis's allegations about the U.S. Postal team, which helped Armstrong win most of his record seven [Tour de France](#) titles, coincide with an investigation by Food and Drug Administration special agent Jeff Novitzky into doping in U.S. cycling. A retrospective test carries the same weight as a current one, and can result in an athlete being banned and stripped of race wins.

While some retroactive testing for DEHP could be clouded because cyclists used to rehydrate with intravenous infusions from bags that may have contained plasticizer, the practice has been banned since 2005, according to WADA's website. Armstrong won the [Tour de France](#) a seventh time in 2005 by which time the [Discovery Channel](#) had become his team sponsor.

"We have no concerns whatsoever about the new plasticizer tests being applied to Lance's samples," Armstrong spokesman Mark Fabiani said yesterday in an e-mailed statement.

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U.S. Anti-Doping Agency chief executive Travis Tygart and Christopher Kelly, an FDA spokesman, didn't immediately return e-mails seeking comment.

### 100 Volunteers

In a study of 100 volunteers, Segura and scientists in Germany and [Hungary](#) found the urine of those who had transfusions had a far higher concentration of DEHP, the shortened name for di (2-ethylhexyl)phthalate. The samples were collected at the [German Sports University](#) in Cologne. The project was funded by organizations including [Germany's](#) Interior Ministry and Swiss anti-doping authorities.

The scientists also studied 468 athlete samples for DEHP, finding three of four unusual readings were from cyclists on the same team, according to findings published by the journal last month. The identities of the team and riders weren't disclosed.

WADA director general David Howman said in an e-mail that a published study could help implement a test.

"Publication in a peer-review journal is one of the elements that WADA takes into account in the validation of a detection methodology," Howman wrote.

### Extra Research

Segura is now leading additional research.

"There are studies ongoing to find out if this can be a stand-alone test," Segura said two days ago, adding he couldn't put a time frame on how long that might take.

Those studies would need to rule out that high levels of [DEHP residues](#) could come from other sources such as plastics used in food packaging, said Canberra, Australia-based Parisotto said. Researchers would probably also need to "ramp up" the number of tests on volunteers, Parisotto said.

Such additional research would probably take about six months, Parisotto said.

"There is a really good platform for this to go to the next level," Parisotto said.

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