



INTERNATIONAL
CONSORTIUM ON
FEMALE SPORT

Media Guide

The 2024 Paris Olympics: Males in Women's Events

Provided by
The International Consortium on Female Sports (ICSF)
and the Independent Council on Women's Sports (ICONS)



During the Olympics you may hear about male athletes competing or seeking to compete in the women's category.

This guide contains fact-based answers to a few common questions that arise when this happens.

If you have more questions, please contact us at info@iconswomen.com; we can connect you with scientific and medical experts who can provide you with more details and facts on this topic.

Who are the males who want to compete in the women's category?

There are two typical situations. The first is when a male who identifies as a woman seeks to compete as a woman. The second is when an athlete who has the genetic profile of a male and a medical condition known as a Difference in Sexual Development (DSD) seeks to compete as a woman. In both cases these athletes have experienced the permanent sports performance enhancing effects of being male. These effects are driven by many factors with one of the most influential being testosterone (T). During early periods of male development and particularly during male puberty, T levels significantly increase driving greater sports performance in males compared to females.

But isn't there lots of overlap in the performances of men and women?

No. Sports are defined by strength, speed, power, and endurance. Men outperform women by between about 10 and 40 - 50% depending on the sport.¹ In athletics (track & field) and swimming there are hundreds and even thousands of males who are faster than the fastest females and the world records for women have been bested in most events by numerous 14- or 15-year-old boys.

But don't T levels overlap in males and females, and isn't sex a continuum?

No, T levels dramatically increase in males at puberty and their effects are permanent. Outside of rare specific medical conditions, T levels do not overlap in adult males and females. No, biological sex is binary. At its fundamental level, females are defined by large gametes (eggs) and males by small gametes (sperm). There are over 6500 genes which expresses differences between males and females.² Individuals with rare DSD syndromes are still male or female. The rate of DSD syndromes in the population is about 0.018% (less than 1/5000).³

Isn't everything OK if these athletes just suppress their testosterone for a few years?

No. All scientific studies have shown that reducing T into the female range for years in males does not abolish the differences in strength and endurance that males typically have over females.⁴ Even when males reduce their T, the drop in their performance is less than the typical sex differences seen between males and females. In other words, males on T suppression still retain a sports performance advantage over females. This is why such athletes typically will place higher when competing against women compared to when they competed against men. Plus, other physical male attributes like differences in height, lung size and other anatomical advantages that effect sports performance do not change.

The Olympics are about participation, why exclude these athletes?

Requiring competition to be based on sex excludes no one. Everyone is welcome to compete in the category consistent with their sex.

Are the rules about who can compete in the women's category consistent for all Olympic sports?

No, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) does not have a policy on eligibility for the women's category. Rather, the IOC lets each sport's governing body make their own rules about who gets to compete in the women's category.

What about the non-binary runner competing for the American team?

This athlete is female and has always competed in the women's category.

What terminology should journalists use to describe athletes?

As sex is the strongest determinant of athletic performance, journalists must be able to report the sex of an athlete. Language that ignores or obfuscates sex of an athlete is harmful and discriminatory to women. The terms male and female are clear and respectful scientific language which reflect the reality of the human body. These terms must take precedence over language of personal identification and beliefs in order to preserve the rights and safety of female athletes. The Lexicon of the International Consortium on Female Sports provides journalists with useful definitions.⁵

The IOC media guide for the 2024 Paris Olympics serves to undermine the rights of women to be accurately represented in our fight against sex-based discrimination in sport.⁶

Women deserve language which clearly articulates the objective reality of our physical bodies, so that sex-based discrimination cannot be ignored. The IOC states that terms to be avoided include: "born male", "born female", "biologically male", "biologically female", "genetically male", "genetically female". The IOC considers these terms to be "dehumanizing and inaccurate when used to describe transgender sportspeople and athletes with sex variation." There is nothing dehumanizing or inaccurate in reporting the sex of an athlete. What is dehumanizing to women is to ignore the sex-based reality of sports performance advantage.

The instructions by the IOC to journalists to obscure sex of athletes undermines integrity in sports and perpetuates discrimination against women. Furthermore, it erases an audience's ability to understand if the athlete is male or female and if women face unfair competition while sports organizations support the gender identity of males. For these reasons we denounce the IOC media guide and call on all journalists to accurately report on sex of athletes as it pertains to competition and eligibility policies.

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