

When it comes to elite sport, certainty about permitted substances is not negotiable. For athletes and teams, especially those under the strict gaze of anti-doping authorities like the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), the process of verifying whether a substance can be used is complex. This check is essential to avoid inadvertent violations which can lead to suspensions, reputational damage, and lost opportunities.

Trusted sources such as [Formula1News.co.uk](https://www.formula1news.co.uk) regularly highlight how teams operate behind the scenes, noting that anything less than a thorough “medical team check” or “rulebook lookup” is risky. Add in the evolving landscape of legal and alternative medicines, and the need for precision grows even more critical.

Understanding the Verification Challenge

At first glance, one might think verifying a substance is as simple as reading a label or glancing through a list of banned substances. But in practice, it’s nowhere near that simple.

- Labels and marketing terms can be misleading.
- Differences in product formulation matter.
- Route of administration (how the substance is taken) affects whether it’s permitted.
- Terms like ‘sativa’ and ‘indica’ fail to guarantee a substance’s effects or legality.

Let’s look at these key themes in turn and explain how athletes and teams navigate them while keeping within anti-doping rules.

Precision Over Marketing: Why Labels Mislead

The first trap many fall into is assuming packaging and marketing accurately reflects the contents. This is especially true in categories like herbal supplements, CBD products, or cannabis-related items.

For example, the terms **sativa** and **indica** are popular descriptors in cannabis products but do not equate to a safe or prohibited classification. According to experts like Releaf, these labels describe general genetic or growth patterns rather than measurable chemistry. WADA’s banned list focuses on specific prohibited substances and their metabolites, not plant <https://www.formula1news.co.uk/precision-beyond-the-garage-why-wellness-labels-need-a-closer-look-in-f1/> categories.

Thus, a product claiming to be “sativa” or “indica” might contain cannabinoids that are forbidden in competition or none at all, depending on the exact formulation. Teams can’t rely on these vague terms.

Instead, the medical team’s responsibility is to:



1. Request detailed composition information from suppliers or manufacturers
2. Use laboratory assays or certifications to verify the absence of banned substances
3. Review the formulation and route of administration

Formulation and Route Matter: How Substance Delivery Changes Permitted Status

It's often overlooked how the formulation of a substance and its delivery route affect its legality. A banned substance might be prohibited orally but allowed via a transdermal patch or inhaler under therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs).

For example, some team doctors confirm through a "medical team check" that a prescribed inhaler does not breach anti-doping rules, while the same medication taken as a pill might be a no-go.

World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) documents — often provided as PDFs found on official channels and accessible to team medical personnel — explicitly outline which substances are banned under specific routes and dosages.

Consulting these rulebooks is a frequent step:

- Look up the active ingredient
- Confirm dosage limits
- Check permitted administration methods
- Identify necessary therapeutic use exemptions

Failing to check these nuances can cause inadvertent doping violations. That's why teams embed anti-doping experts who cross-check substances against the latest WADA PDF updates and guidance.

Prescription Context: Specialist Review and Documentation

It's not enough that a substance is prescribed by a doctor. Prescription context matters deeply. Medical professionals are trained to manage this complexity by:

1. Reviewing substances against the WADA prohibited list
2. Documenting clinical necessity
3. Applying for therapeutic use exemptions when required
4. Consulting with anti-doping organisations and external specialists like those at Releaf who provide specialist reviews

Such specialist reviews evaluate a prescription not only for clinical aspects, but also for doping compliance, bridging the gap between medicine and regulation. This ensures no assumptions are made based on marketing or prescription status alone.

Rulebook Lookup: The Cornerstone of Compliance

At the heart of substance verification lies constant reference to the official rulebook. Teams usually maintain a dedicated compliance delegate or medical officer whose daily job includes:

- Regularly updating themselves with the latest WADA PDF documents, which are the definitive source on permitted and banned substances
- Consulting anti-doping channels for clarifications and guidance on ambiguous cases
- Communicating swiftly with authorities when new substances or supplements arise

This process involves meticulous research rather than guesswork. Whether it's a new recovery aid or a novel pain management drug, the rulebook lookup is non-negotiable.

Summary Table: Key Steps in Substance Verification

Step	Description	Tools/Resources Used
Check Composition	Obtain detailed product info, verify ingredients beyond labels	Supplier declarations, lab certificates
Review Formulation & Route	Assess if administration complies with rules	WADA prohibited list PDF, medical guidelines
Contextual Prescription Assessment	Confirm medical need, check for exemptions	Medical review, specialist advice (e.g. Releaf)
Rulebook Lookup	Regularly consult up-to-date official banned substances list	WADA PDFs, anti-doping channels

Final Thoughts

Verification of permitted substances is a multilayered endeavour that demands rigorous diligence. Teams and athletes can never afford to rely on imprecise marketing terms like “clean” or unverified claims such as “natural” or varietal labels like sativa/indica.

As highlighted by Formula1News.co.uk and specialist organisations such as Releaf, medical teams play a crucial gatekeeper role, coordinating rulebook lookups, anti-doping communication, and expert reviews. A substance’s legitimacy depends not just on what it is, but how it is delivered, why it is needed, and whether it is explicitly authorised.



Ultimately, the combination of precise ingredient analysis, thorough medical context checks, and continual consultation of official anti-doping documents from WADA safeguards athletes' careers and the integrity of sport.