The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games Prepares for the Summer Olympics

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Soon after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) approves a city’s bid to host an Olympic Games, local organizing committees are formed. It takes a significant amount of time and teamwork to prepare for the health coverage of all Olympic participants. The planning for the Olympics in Atlanta this summer, to begin July 26, has been carried out by the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG).

Atlanta is expecting more than 45,000 direct participants—athletes, coaches, officials, and Olympic staff/volunteers—and over 2 million spectators. The Medical Services Department of the ACOG has been working since 1991 to anticipate the needs of all attendees, secure appropriate medical volunteers, obtain support from local hospitals and medical facilities, and arrange for transportation services as needed. In addition, the department has tried to facilitate various research and education projects that will be conducted concurrently with the Olympic Games.

The Medical Services Department consists of 8 primary sections:
- Medical Command Center
- Olympic Village
- Venue Support
- Olympic Games Hospital Network
- Doping Control
- Data Collection Center
- Research
- Public Education

Overview of Sections

Medical Command Center

As with any organization, the key to efficiency is communication between the component parts. Both the ACOG Medical Command Center and the Venue Medical Command Center were created to coordinate services whenever a need arises.

ACOG Medical Command will serve as headquarters for the Olympic Games’ chief medical officer and program director. It will be open 24 hrs a day and will communicate between all sites. Resources such as medical personnel, equipment, and information will then be allocated accordingly.

Venue Medical Command will serve as the direct line between venue personnel and the chief medical officer (at the ACOG Medical Command Center). It will also coordinate services locally at the venue site. If an injured athlete needs to be transported to a hospital, Venue Medical Command will coordinate venue security and transportation and will notify the venue hospital. It will then notify ACOG Medical Command, which in turn will contact the IOC and the national Olympic committee of that athlete’s country.

Venue Medical Command will also arrange translator services when medical personnel render treatment to non-English-speaking athletes or spectators. The Language Services Department is expected to be heavily utilized, as there will be over 100 languages spoken at the Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Olympic Village

The Olympic Village, located on the campus of Georgia Tech, will be home to approximately 15,000 participants. The Medical Services Department will operate a “polyclinic” medical center in the Village. The polyclinic will be housed in Georgia Tech’s student health center and will be open 24 hrs a day. An outpatient clinic will provide the following services: emergency room, radiology, orthopedics, dentistry, ophthalmology, gynecology, internal medicine, ENT, podiatry, pharmacology, and sport psychology.

The polyclinic will also house a sports medicine clinic providing traditional athletic therapy and massage therapy services. Rehabilitation equipment, such as
therapeutic modalities, will be available for all athletes since many national teams are unable to bring these items with them. The polyclinic will provide expeditious care for the athletes; diagnostic tests, triage, and rehabilitation will be provided on site. The efficiency of the polyclinic will depend on the efforts of more than 800 medical volunteers, including 170 physicians.

**Venue Support**

Venue support for medical situations will include mobile teams, first aid stations, sports medicine stations, and ambulance stations. Mobile teams will consist of two American Red Cross first responder volunteers, an emergency medical technician (EMT), and a paramedic. The mobile teams will rove the spectator areas on the lookout for potential problems and will provide first aid care. These teams will be on foot, bicycles, golf carts, or all-terrain vehicles.

The first responders will carry backpacks with venue-specific first aid items (e.g., water may be added to the packs at track & field events but not at gymnasiums). They will triage and provide immediate first aid to injured spectators. They will then call the team EMT or paramedic as needed. Some 500 first responders have been recruited and trained by the American Red Cross specifically for these mobile teams.

Approximately 121 venue first aid stations will be in operation during the Summer Olympics. Each venue will have from 1 to 10 stations with the capacity to care for at least 2 critically injured patients simultaneously.

Medical coverage on the field will be provided by the nearest sports medicine station. Olympic teams often bring their own medical personnel. However, some countries cannot provide this service or their supplies may be limited. The ACOG medical team can be a primary, secondary, or tertiary provider, depending on the needs of the particular team. Understandably, it will be a primary provider when athletes are injured and their countries have not arranged medical care.

Athletic trainers will generally be the initial contacts with these injured athletes because Georgia law stipulates that individuals with athletic training certification must be at the field of play. An injured athlete may then be transported to the sports medicine station for emergency evaluation and treatment. The sports medicine station will be staffed with physicians, nurses, physical therapists, athletic trainers, and massage therapists at all times to ensure that the athlete can return to competition as soon as possible.

In the unfortunate event that an athlete needs more care or services than can be provided at the sports medicine station, he or she will be transported to the polyclinic or a designated hospital. There will be ambulance stations at every venue; in all, 39 ambulances will be deployed for the Games during all hours of operation. Each venue will have 1 to 4 ambulances at any given time, although the number may increase if ACOG Medical Command deems this appropriate. The ambulances will transport either to the venue’s designated hospital, the nearest facility, or the facility of the patient’s choice.