

Biggest challenge at London 2012 Olympics was reassuring politicians, media that there were no health threats

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In this Review, researchers led by Dr Brian McCloskey, who coordinated the Health Protection Agency's seven year preparations for the London 2012 Olympic Games, report that although no major public health incidents arose during the Games, the biggest challenge was reassuring the organising committee, government, media, and the public that there were no health-protection concerns.

The authors point out that although the overall risk of public health problems, including infectious disease outbreaks, at large-scale international sporting events is small, [public health surveillance](#) and response systems need to be ready to detect and respond much quicker than normal. In addition, the need for reassurance about the absence of such threats is much greater than previously thought and could challenge traditional health surveillance systems. They call for enhancements to surveillance and reporting systems to be made a key part of [public health](#) planning for future [sporting events](#) like the upcoming 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.

According to Dr McCloskey, "Demand for information about any possible risk to the Games and to the reputation of the host country is huge. Politicians and decision makers often seek reassurance that nothing is happening—this negative finding is not easily and reliably obtained from routine surveillance systems because they are not primarily designed to prove that nothing is happening. So these systems

need to be reviewed and enhanced to fulfil this role effectively. The good thing is that these enhanced systems are then a positive legacy for the host country."*

More information: www.thelancet.com/series/mass-gatherings-medicine

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