

NFL, union plan to use ex-players as HGH guinea pigs

MANKATO, Minn. — Dozens of former NFL players will be administered human growth hormone as the NFL and its players union try to determine the impact of use on players' HGH levels, three people with knowledge of the plan told USA TODAY Sports on Wednesday.

The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because the study has not been announced publicly.

The tentative plan is for roughly 100 former players to participate in the study, with two-thirds receiving HGH and the other third receiving a placebo. Their HGH levels will be measured before and after the trial.

It's part of the scientific design of the population study that will include blood draws from all current players to determine the so-called decision limit — i.e. the highest HGH level a player can have without facing discipline under the new performance-enhancing drug policy that is still being finalized, the people said.

Current Minnesota Vikings players were informed of the plan Wednesday during a visit from their designated advocates from the NFL Players Association, Martin Bayless and Ernie Conwell.

ADRIAN PETERSON: HGH accusations are a 'compliment'

It was unclear whether any ex-players had agreed to participate in the study, when the HGH would be administered or how prescriptions would be obtained for the drug.

Human growth hormone is naturally produced by the body, stimulating cell reproduction and regeneration. It also can be administered artificially and is banned by most international sports organizations as a performance-enhancing drug.

The NFL and the union agreed to blood testing for HGH in the collective bargaining agreement that was finalized two years ago. But a series of issues, including the NFLPA's insistence on the population study to determine what a "normal" HGH level is for an NFL player, has delayed implementation.

Two people with knowledge of negotiations told USA TODAY Sports this week there remains optimism HGH testing could begin in 2013, though a comprehensive agreement has not been finalized.

Follow Tom Pelissero on Twitter @TomPelissero.