



Veterinary
Medicines
Directorate

Code of Practice on the responsible use of animal medicines on the farm

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Supported by the following organisations:



Table of Contents

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|---|----|
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Animal Medicines..... | 3 |
| Authorisation of animal medicines | 3 |
| Diagnosis and prevention of disease | 4 |
| Distribution Categories of animal medicines | 4 |
| Safe use of animal medicines on farm..... | 5 |
| Plan ahead to prevent disease..... | 5 |
| Antibiotic Resistance..... | 6 |
| Buy from authorised sources..... | 7 |
| Keep proper records | 8 |
| Administer medicines properly..... | 9 |
| Sheep Dips | 10 |
| Take proper precautions | 11 |
| Observe withdrawal periods | 11 |
| Store medicines safely | 12 |
| Report any harmful, unexpected side-effects..... | 12 |
| Dispose of unused medicines safely..... | 13 |
| Further Information | 14 |
| References..... | 14 |

Introduction

This Code of Practice has been developed by the **Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)**, with the support of the organisations shown on the front cover. The aim of this code is to provide a helpful reference document for keepers of livestock in respect of the responsible use of animal medicines. It is important that medicines are used responsibly and that the advice provided in this leaflet is followed.

This Code is intended as a general guide and should not be treated as a complete or authoritative statement of the law on any particular case.

Animal Medicines

Animal medicines play an important role in the control and prevention of disease and animal suffering but have the potential to cause harm if not used properly. In the UK, consumers have long enjoyed the benefits of rigorous systems designed to protect them from harmful residues of medicines in their food. These include statutory controls on the authorisation, distribution and use of medicines.

Antibiotics are vital medicines in both human and animal health. Antibiotic resistanceⁱ is a serious concern and the responsible use of antibiotics in all sectors, including livestock production, is needed to help tackle the problem. Antibiotics should not be used as a substitute for good farm management, which helps prevent disease and reduce the need for medicines. The habitual use of antibiotics to prevent disease is not a responsible use of these important medicines.

Authorisation of animal medicines

The VMD is responsible for the authorisation and control of the manufacture and marketing of animal medicines, and also responsible for surveillance of antibiotic sales, antibiotic resistance in bacteria of veterinary origin and for residues of animal medicines in meat and other animal products. Results of these surveillance programmes are published annually.¹

ⁱ Antibiotic resistance is the ability of bacteria that are usually sensitive to a type of antibiotic to become resistant to it.

Diagnosis and prevention of disease

It is the role of your veterinary surgeon to ensure that any animal diseases are properly diagnosed and the correct treatment prescribed. Your veterinary surgeon will also provide vital input into the design of preventive health programmes that aid in minimising the occurrence of disease, i.e. Flock or Herd Health Plans. You should therefore consult your veterinary surgeon when you notice symptoms of ill health or poor performance in your livestock, when a treatment prescription for your animals may be needed, or when you need to design or modify a preventative disease programme.

Distribution Categories of animal medicines

Once a disease has been diagnosed and treatment prescribed or a preventive programme designed, it may be necessary to obtain an animal medicine. All animal medicines in the UK are assigned one of four distribution categories:

1. Prescription Only Medicines - Veterinarian (POM-V)

An animal medicine classified as a POM-V may only be supplied once it has been prescribed by a veterinary surgeon following a clinical assessment of the animal (or group of animals) which must be under the care of the prescribing veterinarian. All products that contain an antibiotic, including in-feed, are classified as POM-V. POM-V products may only be supplied by veterinary surgeons and pharmacists.

2. Prescription Only Medicines – Veterinarian, Pharmacist, Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) (POM-VPS)

An animal medicine classified as POM-VPS may only be prescribed by a registered veterinary surgeon, pharmacist or Suitably Qualified Person (SQP). An SQP is a person who is trained and registered to be able to sell a limited range of veterinary medicinal products and often works from a pet shop, saddlery or in agricultural merchant's premises. A clinical assessment of the animal(s) is not a prerequisite when prescribing this category of animal medicine and the animal does not have to be under the care of a veterinarian. The person prescribing, however, must be satisfied that the person administering the medicine has the competence to do so safely and that the

medicine is intended for its authorised use. The prescriber must provide advice on how to use the product, making specific reference to any warnings or contra-indications relevant to the medicine.

3. Non-Food Animal – Veterinarian, Pharmacist, SQP (NFA-VPS)

An animal medicine classified as NFA-VPS may only be supplied by a registered veterinary surgeon, pharmacist or SQP. As with POM-VPS medicines, a clinical assessment of the animal(s) is not a prerequisite for supply of this category. The supplier, however, must be satisfied that the person administering the medicine has the competence to do so safely and the medicine is intended for its authorised use. The supplier must also provide advice related to any warnings or contra-indications relevant to it and also advise on how the product has to be administered.

4. Authorised Veterinary Medicine – General Sales List (AVM-GSL)

An animal medicine classified as an AVM-GSL may be supplied by any retailer as there are no restrictions on its supply.

Safe use of animal medicines on farm

Ultimately it is the farmer who is responsible for ensuring that animal medicines are used in a safe, responsible and effective way in accordance with labeling instructions and any advice given by a veterinary surgeon, pharmacist or SQP.

Plan ahead to prevent disease

Prevention is the best policy. Work with your veterinary surgeon to draw up a clear Animal Health Plan to identify the best ways to prevent or treat disease in your animals and to ensure their welfare is fully taken into account. This may require necessary changes to farm management practice, for example improving biosecurity. Your health plan should include any routine medication that your veterinary surgeon has identified as necessary, including those incorporated in medicated feedingstuffs, and any routine diagnostic investigations that your veterinary surgeon considers necessary in order to monitor the health status of your animals.

Consult your veterinary surgeon when you encounter animal health problems, including loss in productivity, and to obtain advice on the most appropriate animal medicines available to treat or prevent disease. A pharmacist or SQP can provide information on the medicines that they can lawfully supply. However, they are not qualified to carry out clinical assessments of animals.

Antibiotic Resistance

Use of antibiotics is a key factor of development of antibiotic resistance in bacteria. Bacterial infections that are resistant to treatment by antibiotics are increasingly common in human medicine. There are also cases of bacterial infection in animals that are resistant to antibiotic treatment. In order to conserve the effectiveness of antibiotics in future it is important that wherever and whenever these medicines are used, they are used responsibly:

Use as little as possible – farms should be managed so that the risk of disease developing is minimised. Good husbandry practices such as good hygiene, good ventilation, access to clean water, effective biosecurity, and good herd health planning including suitable quarantine of stock and appropriate vaccination strategies, will all help to reduce the disease challenge.

Use as much as necessaryⁱⁱ – when animals become ill they should be treated in accordance with the medicine label instructions and those of the veterinary surgeon.

Antibiotics should not be used habitually to prevent disease, or to compensate for poor hygiene or for inadequate husbandry conditions. All antibiotics, including those administered in-feed, must be prescribed by the veterinary surgeon responsible for the animals to which the treatment will be administered.

ⁱⁱ Extract from the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance Information note on antibiotic resistance and responsible use of antibiotics in farm animals.

Buy from authorised sources

Only buy POM-V, POM-VPS and NFA-VPS category animal medicines directly from the premises or website of a UK based veterinary surgeon, pharmacist, or SQP. Sales from other sources are illegal and the medicines supplied may not be safe or effective and could harm your animals or the consumer.

Only buy and use authorised animal medicines. It is an offence to use or be in possession of unauthorised products unless they have been legally prescribed and supplied for your animals by your veterinary surgeon, pharmacist or SQP. Medicated animal feed will also be suitably labelled. The label should provide detailed information on the authorised animal medicine(s) incorporated within.

If you have any doubts over a medicine being genuine, or suspect anyone of illegal supply or sales practices, you should contact the Enforcement Team at the VMD (01932 336911 or enforcement@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk).

Any medicine that remains following completion of the prescribed course of treatment should be disposed of safely, (see the *Dispose of unused medicines safely* section). There should be no stockpiling of medicines on the farm. Remember that it is illegal to sell or pass on medicines to anyone else unless you are authorised to do so.

If you buy feed supplements to mix on your own premises you must be registered with the VMD, or the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland. If you buy sheep dip you will need to satisfy the Registered Qualified Person that you or an employee holds a City & Guilds Group Level 2 Award in the Safe Use of Sheep Dip.

Keep proper records

Keep a full record of all medicines you buy and those used on your animals. It is a legal requirement to keep a record of all medicines administered to food-producing animals, regardless of their distribution category, including those administered by your veterinary surgeon or in-feed.

Further information on record keeping requirements is available in Veterinary Medicines Guidance Note 14 - Record Keeping Requirements for Veterinary Medicinal Products.² The National Office of Animal Health and the Animal Health Distributors Association publish an Animal Medicine Record Book which includes a form in which these records can be kept.³

At the time of acquisition your record must show:

- name of the product
- the batch number
- date of acquisition
- quantity acquired
- name and address of the supplier

At the time of administration you must also record:

- name of the product
- the date of administration
- quantity administered
- withdrawal period
- identification of the animals treated

Because of the legal requirements which fall on the food industry to avoid residues of animal medicines in human food, it is important that that you keep detailed information on the medicines used on your animals. It may therefore be in your commercial interest to record also the:

- dates on which any withdrawal period for meat, milk or any other animal product ended
- date on which the treatment finished
- name of the person who administered the animal medicine
- expiry dates of any products used

Keep all records for at least five years. This is the minimum period required by law. You should also make these records available for official inspection by:

- officers from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
- officers from the local authority
- in Northern Ireland an officer authorised by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Your veterinary surgeon may also wish to see these records.

Administer medicines properly

Make sure everyone on your premises who handles or administers medicines to animals is responsible for ensuring that any withdrawal period is observed.

Medicines should be handled and administered only by someone competent to do so or under their supervision. Your veterinary surgeon will be able to help with training in the right way to administer animal medicines, including injections. Some medicines must be administered only under the direct supervision of a veterinary surgeon or according to a veterinary surgeon's prescription. Particular care should be taken when handling medicated animal feedingstuffs, further information can be found in Veterinary Medicines Guidance Note 17 on Medicated Feedingstuffs and Specified Feed Additives.⁴

Avoid the unnecessary use of medicines. Only when you are absolutely sure they are necessary should you go ahead with treatment.

Read instructions carefully, including operator safety instructions, and make sure that you understand them before administering any medicine. Check all the information that is available, including the label and package leaflet, and/ or ask your supplier. It is important that the correct dose of medicine is used and that it is administered properly.

Check the expiry date on the label. Do not use any medicine which is past its expiry date. Medicines have a short shelf-life following incorporation into feed. In addition, some medicines have a short shelf-life once the container is opened. Make a note of the date after which the medicated feed or medicine in the opened container should not be used. Dispose of any out-of-date animal medicine in accordance with the advice given in the *Dispose of unused medicines safely* section.

Only use medicines in the way in which they are authorised to be used, i.e. for the approved species and age of animal, and at the approved dose rate, unless otherwise directed by your veterinary surgeon. Never use Prescription Only Medicines on animals other than the ones for which they were originally prescribed unless directed by your veterinary surgeon. It is illegal and potentially dangerous to do so.

Always complete the treatment programme. Once a medicine is first used, the full course of treatment must always be completed to minimise the possible development of resistance.

If in any doubt about any aspect of administering any animal medicine, consult your veterinary surgeon.

Sheep Dips

Sheep dip products must be handled by, or under the supervision of, someone who holds a City & Guilds Group Level 2 Award in the Safe Use of Sheep Dip.

The holder of the Certificate is responsible for the purchase and safe use of sheep dips. When purchasing sheep dip, they must satisfy the supplier that they hold the relevant Certificate of Competence. Where the holder of the Certificate requires someone else to purchase the sheep dip on their behalf, they must ensure that the supplier is made aware of this. The supplier must provide the double-sided laminated safety notice specified in the Regulations and the holder of the certificate must ensure that all co-workers are fully aware of the instructions contained in the notice. When the products are being used, the holder of the certificate need not actually handle the products but must be present and supervise those that do.

Sheep dip is highly toxic and even the smallest quantity must not be allowed to pollute water courses. There are a number of initiatives aimed at emphasising the need to use the products in the correct way so as to minimise the risk of pollution. As part of the Pollution Reduction Programme for sheep dip, the NFU and others have promoted a campaign called "STOP EVERY DROP". Part of this campaign involved the production of a poster.

Take proper precautions

Always observe all of the operator safety instructions on the label. It is essential that the advice on the product label and package leaflet is read and followed each time the medicine is used.

For further information on using animal medicines safely, with particular reference to the COSHH Regulations, refer to the HSE Guidance Note - Veterinary Medicines: Safe Use by Farmers and Other Animal Handlers.⁵

Keep a list of emergency telephone numbers at hand. These should include your local doctor, hospital, veterinary surgeon and pharmacist.

Observe withdrawal periods

Strictly observe any withdrawal period stated on the label for the medicine, or indicated by your veterinary surgeon. This is the period between the end of

treatment and the slaughter of the animal or the taking of eggs, milk or honey for human consumption. It is an offence to slaughter for human consumption, or to sell for slaughter for human consumption, any animal that has not completed its withdrawal period. Remember that if an animal medicine has been used under veterinary guidance in a manner other than that recommended on the label, the appropriate withdrawal period may be affected. Your veterinary surgeon will provide you with information on the withdrawal period in those circumstances.

Store medicines safely

Store medicines in accordance with the instructions on their label. Storage temperature can be critical to maintain the safety and efficacy of a medicine. Light can also damage some medicines. Never leave animal medicines in direct sunlight or allow them to get too hot or to freeze. If they are being stored in a fridge you should ensure that the fridge temperature is checked regularly and is between 2°C and 8°C. Where medicated feed is stored on farm, the feed bins should be clearly labeled with a description of the contents and their expiry date.

Make sure that your medicines are stored securely, where possible under lock and key. Keep medicines in their original containers, clean and out of the reach of children, animals or anyone not supposed to handle them. Store them separately from non-medicines.

Report any harmful, unexpected side-effects

Report any harmful and unintended reactions to animal medicines that you observe in your animals to your veterinary surgeon, the company who market the product or directly to the VMD using the online reporting form.⁶ You should also report cases where it appears that the medicine has not worked as expected or any reactions in people exposed to animal medicines, either directly or by handling treated animals. If you need any assistance or advice on reporting please contact the VMD's Pharmacovigilance Unit (01932 336911 or adverse.events@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk). Further information on pharmacovigilance is available in the VMD's leaflet on the subject.⁷

Dispose of unused medicines safely

Never sell or pass on unused medicines to anyone else. Remember that it is illegal to do so unless you are authorised to supply them.

Do not hoard partly used medicines. Safely dispose of unused or out-of-date medicines and containers and application equipment (including needles to a sharps container) when you finish the treatment for which they were intended. Separate guidance on the safe disposal of animal medicines is available in the HSE Guidance Note - Veterinary Medicines: Safe Use by Farmers and Other Animal Handlers.⁸ Always follow any advice on the label about disposal. Do not dispose of such items with domestic rubbish or pour animal medicines down the drain or toilet unless advised to do so. Your veterinary surgeon may be able to supply you with containers for their safe disposal.

When disposing of animal medicines, other than by treating an animal, the following must be recorded:

- the date of disposal
- the quantity of the product involved
- how and where the product was disposed of

Used sheep dips and similar animal medicines present a particular hazard to the environment. Special care must be taken with their use and disposal can only be done with disposal consent from the Environment Agency or by a contracted sheep dip operator. No diluted sheep dip, no matter how small the amount, should be allowed to enter watercourses. You may risk prosecution if sheep dip is allowed to pollute any watercourse. More information can be found on the gov.uk website.⁹

Further Information

British Veterinary Association – Antibiotics: your role as a farmer

<http://www.bva.co.uk/You-and-your-vet/BVA-advice-leaflets/Antibiotics---your-role-as-a-farmer/>

RUMA – Responsible use of antimicrobials: farmer guidelines

<http://www.ruma.org.uk/antimicrobials.htm>

European Platform for the Responsible Use of Medicines in Animals - Best practice framework for the use of antimicrobials in food-producing animals in the EU

<http://www.epruma.eu/component/downloads/downloads/72.html>

References

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/veterinary-antimicrobial-resistance-and-sales-surveillance-2013>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/record-keeping-requirements-for-veterinary-medicines-vmgn-14>

³ <http://www.noah.co.uk/publications.htm>.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/medicated-animal-feedingstuffs-and-specified-feed-additives-vmgn-17>

⁵ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/as31.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/report-veterinary-medicine-problem>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reporting-side-effects-to-animal-medicines-pharmacovigilance>

⁸ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/as31.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/water-pollution-on-farms#sheep-dip-contamination>

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