



ASSURING THE SAFETY, QUALITY AND EFFICACY OF VETERINARY MEDICINES



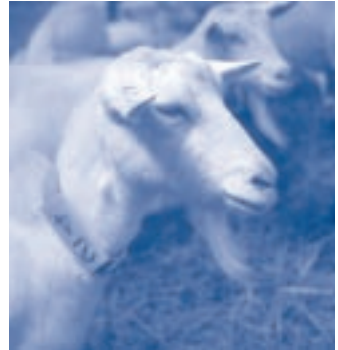
# CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF ANIMAL MEDICINES ON THE FARM

This code is supported by:



# Introduction

**Animal medicines play an important rôle 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 such medicines in their food. These include the controls on the authorisation, distribution and use of such medicines.**



## Authorisation of animal medicines

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is responsible for the authorisation and control of the manufacture and marketing of animal medicines and for surveillance for residues of animal medicines in meat and other animal products.

## Diagnosis and prevention of disease

Veterinary surgeons ensure that animal diseases are properly diagnosed and help to design preventive programmes. You should therefore consult your veterinary surgeon when you require a diagnosis of disease in your animals or when you need to design or modify a preventive disease programme.

## Distribution of animal medicines

Once a disease has been diagnosed or a preventive programme designed, it may be necessary to obtain an animal medicine to treat or prevent it. All animal medicines in the UK are assigned into one of six legal categories:



- Prescription-Only Medicines (**POM**) can only be supplied by veterinary surgeons for animals under their care, or dispensed from a pharmacy in accordance with a written prescription from a veterinary surgeon. Authorised medicated premixes can be incorporated into animal feed under the terms of a medicated feedingstuffs (**MFS**) prescription signed by a veterinary surgeon for animals under his/her care;
- some animal medicines (**P**) can only be supplied by veterinary surgeons in respect of animals under their care, or over the counter from a pharmacy. Others, which appear on the Pharmacy and Merchants' List (**PML**), can also be supplied to keepers of animals by agricultural merchants whose premises are registered and where the sale is authorised by a suitably qualified person. Some medicated feedingstuffs which are exempt from the need for a prescription (**MFSX**) may also be supplied in this way;
- some animal medicines appear on the General Sale List (**GSL**) and may be sold in any retail outlet.

## 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. The following Code of Practice has been drawn up to provide you with guidelines to help you to fulfil this responsibility. *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.*



## Plan ahead to prevent disease

1. **Prevention is the best policy.** Draw up a clear animal health plan, working with your veterinary surgeon to identify the best ways to prevent or treat disease in your animals and to ensure their welfare, including any necessary changes in farm practice. Ensure that your plan takes full account of all medicines you are using including those incorporated in medicated feedingstuffs.
2. **Consult your veterinary surgeon** when you require the diagnosis of any animal health problem and advice on the most appropriate animal medicines available to treat or prevent a disease problem. Pharmacists or AMTRA trained suitably qualified persons can provide information on the medicines that they can lawfully supply.



## Buy from authorised sources

3. **Buy animal medicines, which are not classified as GSL only from your veterinary surgeon, pharmacy, or registered agricultural merchant** in the UK. Sales from other sources may be illegal and the medicines may not be safe or effective and could harm your animals or the consumer.<sup>1</sup>
4. **Only buy and use authorised animal medicines.** It is an offence to use unauthorised products unless legally prescribed by your veterinary surgeon. Authorised products can be identified by the inclusion of a unique code number (sometimes with a PL, Vm or Vh prefix) on the label and packaging.<sup>2</sup> Authorised medicated animal feed will be clearly marked.
5. **Only buy enough of the appropriate medicine** necessary for immediate use (or within their expiry date). Remember that it may be illegal to sell or pass on medicines to anyone else.

<sup>1</sup> Anyone wishing to buy feed supplements to mix on their own premises must be registered with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (telephone 020 7 735 9141) or the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland. Anyone wishing to buy sheep dip will need to satisfy their merchant that they or their employee holds a relevant Certificate of Competence in the safe use of sheep dips from the National Proficiency Test Council (telephone 01203 696553)

<sup>2</sup> Animal medicines dispensed by a veterinary surgeon or from a pharmacy (for example into smaller package sizes) or "specials" made under special arrangements by a manufacturing chemist will not necessarily have this number.



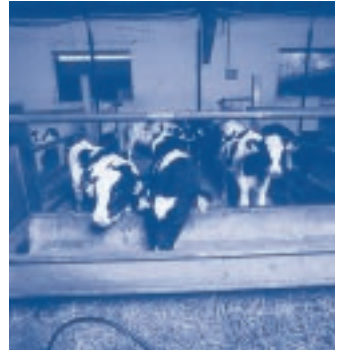
## Keep proper records

6. **Keep a full record of all medicines you buy and those you use on your animals.**<sup>3</sup> It is a legal requirement to keep a record of all medicines administered to food producing animals, including those administered by your veterinary surgeon or in-feed. This record must be kept available for inspection by authorised persons and must show:
  - the name of the animal medicine used;
  - the name and address of the supplier;
  - the date of purchase;
  - the date of administration;
  - the total quantity of animal medicines used;
  - the identity of the animal/group of animals treated; and
  - the number of animals treated.
  
7. Because of the legal requirements, which fall on the food industry about avoiding residues of animal medicines in human food, they will look to you for information about 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;
  - the date on which the treatment finished;
  - the name of the person who administered the animal medicine; and
  - the batch numbers and expiry dates of any products used.
  
8. **Keep all records for at least three years.** This is the minimum period required by law. Records relating to the use of prescription medicines must be kept for five years. You should also make these records available for official inspection by officers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the local authority, in Northern Ireland to an officer authorised by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and to your veterinary surgeon if he/she wishes to see them.

<sup>3</sup> The National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) and the Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA) publish an Animal Medicine Record Book which includes a form in which these records can be kept. This is available from AHDA (telephone 01394 410444, fax 01394 410455) for its current price (£3 in 1999).

## Administer medicines properly

9. **Make sure someone is personally responsible** for recording, safeguarding and administering medicines and for ensuring that any withdrawal period is observed.
10. **Medicines should be handled and administered only by someone competent to do so** or under their supervision.<sup>4</sup> Your veterinary surgeon will be able to help with training in the right way to administer animal medicines, including injections. Remember that some medicines may 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.<sup>5</sup>
11. **Avoid the unnecessary use of medicines.** Only when you are absolutely sure they are necessary should you go ahead with treatment.
12. **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, product leaflet and safety data sheet or ask your supplier. It is important that the correct dosage is used and that it is administered properly. This is particularly important where a medicine is administered by injection.<sup>6</sup>
13. **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 is not to be used. Dispose of any out of date animal medicine in accordance with the advice given in paragraphs 24 and 25 of this Code.
14. **Only use medicines in the way for which they were authorised,** including the approved species, age and dosage, unless otherwise directed by your veterinary surgeon. Never use prescription medicines on animals



<sup>4</sup> Competence testing in the Safe Use of Veterinary Medicines is available from the National Proficiency Tests Council, National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2LG (telephone 02476 696553)

<sup>5</sup> A separate Guidance Note on the handling of medicated feedingstuffs is available on request from VMD (telephone 01932 338345)

<sup>6</sup> A separate Guidance Note on how to reduce the risk of spreading infection when giving single or multiple injections is available on request from VMD (telephone 01932 338345)



other than the ones for which they were originally prescribed – it may be illegal to do so.

15. **Always complete the treatment programme.**
16. **If in any doubt about any aspect of administering any animal medicine, consult your veterinary surgeon.**

## Take proper precautions

17. **Always observe all of the operator safety instructions on the label.<sup>7</sup>**
18. **Keep a list of emergency 'phone numbers at hand.**  
These should include your local doctor, hospital, veterinary surgeon and pharmacist.

## Observe withdrawal periods

19. **Strictly observe any withdrawal period** stated on the label for the medicine, or indicated by your veterinary surgeon, between the end of treatment and the slaughter of the animal or the taking of eggs or milk for human consumption.<sup>8</sup> 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, and you should consult your veterinary surgeon about what withdrawal period is appropriate in those circumstances.

## Store medicines safely

20. **Store medicines in accordance with the instructions on the 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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" available free of charge from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 6FS (telephone 01787 881165).

<sup>8</sup> A separate booklet "Withdrawal Periods for Veterinary Products" is available from the National Office of Animal Health Limited (telephone 020 8 367 3131)



If they are being stored in a fridge you should ensure that the fridge temperature is checked regularly and is between 2° and 8°C. Where medicated feed is stored on farm, the feed bins should be clearly labelled with a description of the contents and their expiry date.

21. **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

22. **Report any harmful and unintended reactions to animal medicines** that you observe in your animals to your veterinary surgeon or directly to the Suspected Adverse Reaction Surveillance Scheme at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. You should also report any reactions in people exposed to animal medicines, either through handling them or handling recently treated animals.

## Dispose of unused medicines safely

23. **Never sell or pass on unused medicines to anyone else.** Remember that it may be illegal to do so.
24. **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.<sup>9</sup> Always follow any advice on the label about disposal. Never dispose of such items with domestic rubbish or pour animal medicines down the drain or toilet. Your veterinary surgeon may be able to supply you with containers for their safe disposal.
25. **Remember that used sheep dips and similar animal medicines present a particular hazard for the environment.** Special care must be taken with their disposal to ensure that they do not contaminate any watercourses or you may be committing an offence.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Separate guidance on the safe disposal of animal medicines is available in the HSE Guidance Note-(AS31) "Veterinary Medicines: Safe Use by Farmers and Other Animal Handlers" available free of charge from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO1 6FS (telephone 01787 881165).

<sup>10</sup> Copies of the booklet "Pollution Prevention Guidelines: Sheep dipping" (PPG12) are available from the Environment Agency (telephone 01454 624400) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (telephone 01786 457700). Under the Groundwater Regulations 1998 a prior authorisation must be obtained before disposing of sheep dips and similar medicines.



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