

Defra Antimicrobial Resistance in Animals Policy Statement

Introduction

1. The Government takes the issue of antimicrobial resistance in humans and animals very seriously. Antimicrobial resistance in animals can lead to problems with their treatment for disease and to the risk of passing resistant bacteria to consumers.

2. The Government recognises that veterinary medicines, including antimicrobials, are required to ensure healthy animals in the UK. For food animals the use of antimicrobials should not replace good farm management. In addition, all animal keepers (this includes but is not limited to farmers) have a responsibility to ensure that they make adequate provision to fulfil all aspects of the welfare requirements of the animals that they keep. This includes the provision of appropriate authorised treatment, including, if warranted, antimicrobial treatment. The system for distributing veterinary medicinal products in the UK is designed to ensure that all veterinary medication is distributed by a person qualified to advise on all aspects of treatment, including appropriate advice on antimicrobial resistance.

3. The Government believes that antimicrobials should be used responsibly in food animal production and is working with industry groups to achieve this. In particular the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) has produced a document entitled 'Code of Practice on the Responsible Use of Animal Medicines on the Farm' and the farming industry's Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) has published responsible use guidelines for antimicrobials for the five major food-producing species. These have been adopted by various farm assurance schemes. In addition other non-governmental bodies, for example the British Veterinary Association (BVA), have also published guidance for veterinary surgeons on the prudent use of antimicrobials.

4. There is increasing scientific support for the view that the increase in antimicrobial resistance affecting human health is largely the result of the prescribing of these products by the medical profession and their use in humans. However it is recognised that the use of antimicrobials in animals has some impact on the occurrence of resistance genes in micro-organisms. There is evidence that antimicrobial use in animals selects for resistance in both pathogenic and commensal micro-organisms.

5. Antimicrobial resistance is an international problem. Prudent use Guidelines for antimicrobials have been published by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and by the EC's Committee on Veterinary Medicinal Products. The VMD works in the international arena at The Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP) and in Codex to ensure the prudent use message is understood.

6. The guiding principle of Defra's policy on antimicrobial resistance is to seek to reduce the impact of antimicrobial resistance in organisms associated with

animals on public health and animal health in a proportionate way, in conjunction with partners and in accordance with Defra's Animal Health and Welfare Strategy.

How is the policy being delivered?

7. Development of Defra's antimicrobial resistance policy in animals and co-ordination of its delivery is undertaken by the Defra Antimicrobial Resistance Co-ordination (DARC) Group. DARC's terms of reference and membership can be found at www.vmd.gov.uk.

8. Antimicrobial resistance affects both humans and animals so the DARC Group membership has broadened over time to ensure that it contains the most appropriate colleagues with human medicine expertise.

9. DARC is the forum used to consider emerging issues and to identify and prioritise how to take these forward. For instance on the emerging issue of MRSA (meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) in animals, DARC has formed a sub-group involving both DARC members and other recognised experts in the field [<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/zoonoses/mrsa.htm>]. The emergence of ESBLs (Extended-Spectrum Beta-Lactamase) in *E. coli* in cattle is also being considered by DARC together with the Department of Health's Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection (ARHAI) [<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/zoonoses/esbl.htm>].

10. Following the Government's Strategy for Enhancing Veterinary Surveillance including a proposed surveillance programme for antimicrobial resistance in animals, Defra published its Strategy for developing and implementing a programme of surveillance for antimicrobial resistance in animals in England and Wales. This document sets out the Defra strategy for developing and maintaining effective mechanisms for identifying, collecting and interpreting the information that will provide early warning of antimicrobial resistance developing in animals.

11. VMD also publish an annual report setting out details of veterinary antimicrobials sold in the UK in the previous year.

12. Copies of all Reports can be obtained from the VMD website at www.vmd.gov.uk under "Publications/Antibiotic related tabs".

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