



**Veterinary Medicines
Guidance Note**

**Controls on the
Administration of
Veterinary
Medicines**

No 15



**ASSURING THE SAFETY, QUALITY AND EFFICACY
OF VETERINARY MEDICINES**



VETERINARY MEDICINES GUIDANCE NOTE 15

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THESE NOTES ARE ONLY A GENERAL GUIDE AND MUST NOT BE TREATED AS A COMPLETE OR AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT OF THE LAW ON ANY PARTICULAR CASE

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INTRODUCTION

1. This is one of a series of guidance notes explaining requirements under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2005. These Regulations came into effect on 30 October 2005 and set out controls on veterinary medicinal products in the UK. Basic information about the scope of the Regulations and the requirement for marketing authorisations is given in VMG Note 1: *An Introduction to Marketing Controls on Veterinary Medicines*. This note describes the provisions controlling the administration of veterinary medicines in the UK.
2. Under the authorisation process veterinary medicines are scientifically assessed against statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy **when used in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations for use**. This takes account of potential risks to animals, people who administer the medicine and those who may consume produce from treated animals, and the environment and forms the basis of a risk/benefit evaluation on which the decision to grant an authorisation is based. The use of medicines in ways that have not been authorised may pose potential risks that the authorisation process seeks to minimise. The law therefore requires the use of medicines authorised for the condition and species being treated wherever possible. Recognising that there will be conditions affecting species for which no medicine is authorised, the legislation provides exemptions in certain circumstances and subject to specified conditions. These are explained below.

PROHIBITION ON ADMINISTRATION

3. The controls on the administration of veterinary medicines are set out in the Regulations. Subject to the exemptions provided in the Regulations, these prohibit the administration of a veterinary medicine unless it is authorised and the administration is in accordance with the applicable marketing authorisation. In the case of food-producing animals, the Regulations also prohibit the administration of medicines unless they have been prescribed by an appropriate person in accordance with controls on distribution. Non-compliance with the provisions is an offence and may result in prosecution.

EXEMPTIONS FROM PROHIBITION

PRODUCTS ADMINISTERED FOR RESEARCH

4. The above prohibitions do not apply in the case of medicines administered for research purposes in accordance with an animal test certificate (ATC) or a licence issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

5. In the event of serious epizootic diseases the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), acting on behalf of the Secretary of State, may permit in writing the marketing and use of immunological products without a marketing authorisation. Also, where the health situation so requires and where no suitable product is available, the VMD, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State, may grant a certificate to a veterinary surgeon permitting the import and use of a medicine authorised outside the UK, subject to any conditions specified in the certificate. In either case, the prohibition on administration will not apply.

IMMUNOLOGICAL PRODUCTS FOR IMPORTED/EXPORTED ANIMALS

6. Where an animal is being imported from, or exported to, a non-EEA country (the European Economic Area comprises the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway), the VMD, acting for the Secretary of State, may permit the use of an immunological product that is not authorised in the UK but is authorised in the exporting/importing country.

THE PRESCRIBING CASCADE – NON-FOOD ANIMALS

7. The prescribing cascade provisions are set out in the Regulations. They are available only to veterinary surgeons who have responsibility for the treatment of the animals concerned.
8. If there is no medicine authorised in the UK for a condition affecting a non food-producing species, the veterinary surgeon responsible for treating the animal(s) may, in order to mitigate unacceptable suffering, treat the animal(s) in accordance with the following sequence:
 - (a) a veterinary medicine authorised in the UK for use in another animal species or for a different condition in the same species; or, if there is no such product
 - (b) either –
 - (i) a medicine authorised in the UK for human use, or
 - (ii) in accordance with an import certificate (see VMG Note 7), a medicine authorised for veterinary use in accordance with Directive 2001/82 (as amended) in another Member State; or, if there is no such product
 - (c) a medicine prepared extemporaneously, by a veterinary surgeon, a pharmacist or a person holding an appropriate manufacturer's authorisation, as prescribed by the veterinary surgeon responsible for treating the animal.
9. A medicine prescribed in accordance with the cascade may be administered by the prescribing veterinary surgeon or by a person acting under their direction. Responsibility for the prescription and use of the medicine remains with the prescribing veterinary surgeon.

10. Horses declared non-food producing under the horse passport scheme are regarded as non-food producing animals for the purposes of these provisions.

THE PRESCRIBING CASCADE – FOOD PRODUCING ANIMALS

11. If there is no medicine authorised in the UK for a condition affecting a food-producing species, the veterinary surgeon responsible for treating the animal(s) may use the cascade options as set out in paragraphs 8 and 9 above except that the following additional conditions apply:
 - the treatment in any particular case is restricted to animals on a single holding;
 - any medicine imported from another Member State (option b(ii)) must be authorised for use in a food-producing species in the other Member State;
 - the pharmacologically active substances contained in the medicine must be listed in Annex I, II or III to Regulation (EEC) No. 2377/90;
 - the veterinary surgeon responsible for prescribing the medicine must specify an appropriate withdrawal period;
 - the veterinary surgeon responsible for prescribing the medicine must keep specified records.

These additional provisions are to ensure that the need for, and propensity to benefit from, the proposed treatment is assessed in each case and to safeguard consumers of produce from treated animals against risk from any potentially harmful residues of the medicines administered.

12. In line with the Directive, the Regulations permit only medicines whose pharmacologically active substances (i.e. those which must appear on product labels) are listed in Annex I to III of Regulation 2377/90 to be used under the cascade in food-producing animals. This is to ensure that only substances whose residues implications have been evaluated and, that, where appropriate, a maximum residue limit (MRL) has been established. Details of the Annexes to Regulation 2377/90 and a consolidated list, which is updated periodically, are available on the European Commission website (<http://pharmacos.eudra.org/F2/mrl/index.htm>).
13. A veterinary surgeon prescribing for, or administering a medicine to, food-producing animals under the cascade is required to specify an appropriate withdrawal period. Unless the medicine indicates a withdrawal period for the species concerned, **this should not be less than:**
 - 7 days for eggs and milk;

- 28 days for meat from poultry and mammals;
- 500 degree days for meat from fish.

Where a homoeopathic veterinary medicinal product whose active principles are in Annex II to Regulation 2377/90 is used, a zero withdrawal period shall apply.

14. The records referred to in paragraph 11 should be retained for at least 5 years and be made available on request to a duly authorised person. The information recorded shall include the:

- date of examination;
- owner's name and address;
- number of animals treated;
- diagnosis;
- product(s) prescribed, including batch numbers where applicable;
- doses administered;
- duration of treatment;
- withdrawal period recommended.

Where client, or other records, contain this information, this will be acceptable. It is not necessary to maintain additional separate records as long as the information is accessible. Veterinary surgeons may also find it helpful to include information identifying treated animals among their records. (Further information on record-keeping requirements is contained in VMG Note 16.) Notwithstanding the legal requirements, the VMD advises that it is good practice for veterinary surgeons to keep records of all unauthorised and off-label treatments and, wherever possible, to explain to clients what they are doing, and why, and to secure their agreement to the treatment.

VETERINARY SURGEONS FROM OTHER MEMBER STATES

15. Veterinary surgeons established in another Member State of the European Economic Area (EEA) (i.e. the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) that provide services in the UK may bring with them and administer small quantities of non-immunological medicines that are not authorised in the UK subject to certain conditions. In summary, these conditions are:

- the overall range and quantities brought in must not exceed those generally required for daily needs of good veterinary practice;
- the medicines must be authorised in the Member State in which the veterinary surgeon is established;
- the medicines must be brought into the UK by the veterinary surgeon in the original manufacturer's packaging;

- medicines for food-producing animals must have the same composition of active substances as a UK authorised product;
 - the veterinary surgeon must be familiar with good veterinary practices applied in the UK and ensure that withdrawal periods specified on labels are complied with unless longer periods are appropriate;
 - only sufficient medicines to complete the course of treatment may be supplied to animal owners/keepers;
 - the veterinary surgeon must keep records of animals treated, diagnosis, products administered, dosage, duration of treatment and withdrawal periods and make them available to a duly authorised person in the UK for at least three years.
16. The provisions referred to in paragraph 15 do not apply to immunological medicines.

FURTHER GUIDANCE ON THE PRESCRIBING CASCADE

ENFORCEMENT

17. The cascade provisions will be enforced principally by the State Veterinary Service who, during their visits to practices, will wish to confirm that veterinarians are observing the requirements and are keeping the required records.

INTERPRETATION OF THE CASCADE PROVISIONS

18. Definitive interpretation of legislation can only be given by the Courts. The aims of the administration provisions are to ensure that unauthorised medicines are used only when no product is authorised for the condition and species concerned, and, in the case of food-producing animals, to ensure that potentially harmful residues of veterinary medicines do not enter the food chain. It is likely that they will be interpreted in the light of how a competent and professional veterinary surgeon would reasonably act in pursuance of the aims in a particular set of circumstances. The following notes are offered as illustrative examples of the VMD's view of how the cascade provisions may be applied.

A CONDITION AFFECTING A PARTICULAR SPECIES

19. The starting point for recourse to the cascade is that if there is no authorised product in the UK for a condition affecting a particular species, a veterinary surgeon may prescribe another product in accordance with the cascade provisions. In other words, where a product is authorised for the treatment of the condition in the species concerned, the veterinarian's first port of call should be that product.

20. Circumstances may arise, however, where a veterinarian exercising his or her professional expertise and judgment in the interests of the animals concerned may consider that there is no authorised treatment in the UK for the condition or species to be treated.
21. One example of such circumstances might be where microbiological tests show that a particular strain of an organism has developed resistance to all products whose labels contain indications against it. In this situation, a veterinarian may consider that no authorised treatment exists for that condition and would, of course, wish to prescribe a treatment that will be effective. If treating food animals, he or she should work down the cascade to identify a treatment whose ingredients are authorised for food animal use, but this constraint will not apply when treating companion animals.
22. Further examples of possible circumstances where a veterinarian might have recourse to the cascade are set out below. The list is neither exhaustive nor definitive, and each case would need to be judged on its individual merits. Most of the examples given derive from companion animal practice, since the consumer protection considerations given at paragraph 11 above mean that less flexibility exists when treating food-producing animals.
 - **Dosage considerations** - Sometimes a veterinarian may consider that the effective treatment of a particular condition in a particular animal requires a different dosage from one that appears on the label of a product. In such circumstances recourse to the cascade may be appropriate and the next option would be to consider the merits of using that product at an off-label dosage (another condition in the same species) or a different authorised veterinary medicine. If neither could safely be administered at the dosage required, the veterinary surgeon should consider further options under the cascade.
 - **Individual Characteristics** - If a particular animal has characteristics, such as age, general condition or known sensitivity to a particular substance, which the veterinarian judged to present unacceptable risks and to contra-indicate the use of the authorised product, he or she could conclude that no authorised product existed for that condition in that animal and consider other treatments.
 - **Chronic Infections** - If a condition persists following treatment with an authorised product, the veterinarian may consider in a particular case that there is no authorised treatment for that particular condition and that further use of medicines containing similar substances is contra-indicated. In such circumstances it would be legitimate to consider alternatives in accordance with the cascade.
 - **Build-up of resistance** - In relation to anthelmintics, current advice is that resistance is likely to be encouraged by the repeated use of a single product and may be avoided, with beneficial consequences for the health and welfare of the treated animals, by the use of two or more products in rotation. If there

is only a single product authorised for anthelmintic use in a particular species, the veterinarian may consider that the condition cannot be controlled using only the authorised product and use it in rotation with another product selected according to the cascade.

- **Complex conditions** - Diagnosis is a matter for the veterinary surgeon under whose care an animal or animals have been placed. Some conditions can be viewed overall and treated accordingly. For instance, pneumonia may be regarded as a single condition. On the other hand, the diagnosis may be of more than one concurrent condition, such as pneumonia with fluid retention. In such circumstances the veterinarian would need to exercise his or her professional skills to reach a diagnosis and prescribe the most effective treatment. If he or she considered that in the circumstances there were two or more concurrent conditions, the treatment of each would need to be considered in accordance with the Regulations, taking due account of the usual factors such as drug incompatibilities or side-effects.
- **Unavailability of Products** - If a product cannot be obtained despite diligent search and in a reasonable time (this will vary according to circumstances, and there may be cases where urgency dictates that a veterinarian uses whatever is to hand, whether authorised or not), the veterinarian may conclude that in the circumstances it does not exist. In such circumstances the cascade should be followed to identify a suitable alternative.

SUSPECTED ADVERSE REACTIONS

23. In some of the above examples, a veterinarian might conclude that an authorised product does not exist in a particular case because he or she suspects a lack of efficacy or the likelihood of unacceptable side effects. All experiences of this kind involving veterinary medicines, whether authorised or unauthorised, should be reported as suspected adverse reactions to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate where they are recorded and monitored. Unless such reports are received the incidence and severity of side effects, and the ongoing efficacy of products, cannot be assessed, and consequential action taken as necessary, for example, to amend product literature.

COMPANION ANIMALS – PARTICULAR POINTS

24. The following circumstances might arise in companion animal practice:
- **Animal Owner Considerations** - If a veterinary surgeon considers that, for example, an elderly or disabled pet owner would have difficulty in crushing and administering tablets which were the only form in which an authorised product was available, it would be unlikely that action would be taken if he or she concluded that medicine in tablet form were not appropriate in the circumstances, and alternatives in line with the cascade were considered.
 - **Medicines Commonly Found Around the Home** - Sometimes a veterinarian may judge there is a need to alleviate a pet's discomfort until a home visit can

be made or the animal brought to the surgery. It would be unlikely that action would be taken if in such circumstances a home remedy, e.g. aspirin, were to be recommended.

GENERIC AND NOVEL DRUGS

25. Generic medicinal products authorised for veterinary use may, of course, be used in the same way as any other authorised veterinary medicine. However, medicinal products authorised for human use, whether generics or not, may only be used in accordance with the cascade when there is no authorised veterinary product.
26. Novel medicines are authorised only following scientific evaluation designed to assess and minimise any potential risks (see paragraph 2). If a veterinary surgeon considers that there is no authorised treatment for a particular condition or species then, in order to avoid unacceptable suffering, a novel drug may be prescribed in accordance with the cascade. Where food-producing animals are concerned, the use of novel medicines remains subject to compliance with the requirements set out in paragraph 11 above.

UNACCEPTABLE SUFFERING

27. The VMD considers that no suffering that can be treated without placing consumers at risk is acceptable.

COST OF MEDICINES

28. In exercising clinical and professional judgement, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate does not consider that cost is a factor that can be legitimately taken into account by the veterinarian in having recourse to the cascade as an alternative to an authorised veterinary medicine, although it is ultimately a matter for the Courts. However, while every case will be examined on its merits, prosecution may, for example, be considered inappropriate where a client was prescribed the cheaper human alternative because he/she was unable to afford a costlier treatment, and failure to use the cheaper alternative would, for example, have meant that the animal would have to be put down.

FURTHER INFORMATION

29. Further information is available from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Woodham Lane, New Haw, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 3LS - Tel: (+44) (01932) 336911, or Fax: (+44) (01932) 336618. Veterinary Medicines Guidance Notes and other information, including details of VMD contacts, are available on the VMD website (www.vmd.gov.uk).

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