

Responsible use of antimicrobials in sheep production

The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) was established in November 1997 to promote the highest standards of food safety, animal health and animal welfare in British livestock farming.

A unique initiative involving organisations representing every stage of the food chain, RUMA aims to promote a co-ordinated and integrated approach to best practice in the use of medicines.

RUMA membership spans the food chain and includes organisations representing interests in agriculture, veterinary practice, the pharmaceutical industry, retail, consumers and animal welfare interests.

In order for medicines to be used responsibly they must be lawfully obtained and used in accordance with the label directions or veterinary advice.

Produced by the Sheep Working Group of the **RUMA Alliance**

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RUMA guidelines for the responsible use of antimicrobials by sheep farmers have been designed to give easy-to-read guiding principles that can be used by sheep producers in the management of their flocks.

Antimicrobials have, for decades, made a major contribution to continually improving sheep health and welfare. As such they are vital medicines for the treatment of bacterial infections in sheep.

The emergence of antimicrobial resistance as a serious problem in human medicine has prompted concerns that a crossover of resistance or resistant bacteria from livestock could take place into the human population (and vice versa). If this occurred the effectiveness of some medical antimicrobial treatments could be compromised.

The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) is a growing coalition of organisations representing every stage of the “farm to fork” process. It has been set up to review and provide guidance on the use of medicines in all livestock. As part of this work RUMA has established practical strategies to reduce the need to use antimicrobials, where appropriate.

To communicate these strategies effectively to the industry RUMA has produced a comprehensive set of guidelines for the responsible use of antimicrobials in sheep and other livestock production. These give advice on aspects from application and use, to responsibilities of farmers and veterinary surgeons, to strategies for reducing the need for usage. **This booklet summarises the responsibilities that sheep farmers have as they use antimicrobials to safeguard the health and welfare of their flock.**

For Farmers

The use of animal medicines carries with it responsibilities. Under UK legislation, all antimicrobials are licensed for specific species and uses.

A product will not be authorised unless very stringent requirements are met. The use of therapeutic antimicrobials is under the direct responsibility of veterinary surgeons.

Farmers, however, have a very considerable role to play in ensuring that the directions of the veterinary surgeon are properly carried out and also in developing and applying disease control measures which minimise the need for antimicrobial use.

THE GUIDELINES

All farmers have a responsibility for the health and welfare of the animals under their control. There are occasions where this is a joint responsibility with their veterinary surgeon, such as in the discharge of correct and appropriate antimicrobial treatment and care. Farmers and stock-keepers can play a major role in ensuring that these responsibilities are properly discharged and that medicines are responsibly used by observing the guidelines published here. Similar guidelines form part of all farm assurance schemes.

- All sheep farmers must be totally committed to producing safe food.
- Sheep keepers have a duty and responsibility to safeguard the health and welfare of animals on their farm.
- An appropriate flock health plan should be drawn up, observed and regularly reviewed in association with the attending veterinary surgeon. This plan should outline routine preventative treatments and management practices to cover issues such as foot care and vaccination programmes along with worming, lice and mite control strategies. Flock performance should be monitored for signs of disease and the flock health plan updated and implemented to take account of such signs.
- Therapeutic antimicrobial products should be regarded as complementing good management farm hygiene and biosecurity.
- Treatment with a medicine that requires veterinary prescription should only be initiated with formal veterinary approval.
- Accurate information must be given to the veterinary surgeon to ensure that correct diagnosis and dosages can be calculated. Clear instruction regarding diagnosis, medication, dosage and administration must be made available in written form to all who are involved in the care of the animals concerned.

- The prescribing veterinary surgeon must be made aware of all other medicines being administered to the animals concerned so that adverse reactions can be avoided.
- The full course of treatment at the correct dosages must always be administered in a careful manner.
- For in-feed or in-water medication, ensure that the end of medication is marked by cleaning the header tank or feed bin as appropriate.
- All involved with the treatment must make themselves aware of the medicine information relating to withdrawal periods both for sheep destined for slaughter and for those involved in producing milk for human consumption. This can usually be found on medicine labels but may be set by the veterinary surgeon.
- An animal medicines record book, copies of relevant regulations and Codes of Good Practice must be kept safely on farm (e.g. the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) Code of Practice on the Responsible Use of Animal Medicines on the Farm).
- Accurate information must be kept on the identity of the sheep being treated as well as the nature of the condition being treated. Records should also include the batch number, amount and expiry date of the medicine used plus treatment time and date information for each animal treated and the withdrawal period that must be observed. Medicine records required by legislation should be maintained for at least five years (even if the sheep in question have been slaughtered).
- Information on all medicines in use should be readily available to stock-keepers and kept on file e.g. product data sheets, package inserts and safety data sheets.
- Follow the advice of manufacturers and regulatory bodies on the storage of medicines and the disposal of unused medicines (check the label or package insert). Safely dispose of unused or out-of-date medicines and

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RUMA is made up of the following organisations:

Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC)

Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA)

Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA)

British Poultry Council (BPC)

British Retail Consortium (BRC)

British Veterinary Association (BVA)

Linking Environment & Farming (LEAF)

Meat & Livestock Commission (MLC)

National Beef Association (NBA)

National Consumer Council (NCC)

National Farmers' Union (NFU)

National Office of Animal Health (NOAH)

National Pig Association (NPA)

NPTC

National Sheep Association (NSA)

Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF)

Royal Pharmaceutical Society of GB (RPSGB)

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)

containers and application equipment (including needles to a sharps container) when you finish the treatment for which they were intended. If in any doubt seek advice from your veterinary surgeon or whoever supplied the product.

- Any suspected adverse reaction in a sheep to any medication should be reported immediately to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and the supplier. The report to VMD can be done through the prescribing veterinary surgeon or the supplier. The adverse reaction can be reported by the livestock keeper direct to the VMD. Adverse reaction forms can be found on its website www.vmd.gov.uk. All such suspected reactions should also be accurately recorded in the on-farm medicine records
- Cooperate with and observe the rules of farm assurance schemes that monitor medication and withdrawal compliance. However any sheep keeper should never feel constrained from safeguarding the health and welfare of the sheep.
- Work with the farm veterinary surgeon in monitoring the effectiveness of antimicrobials used in your sheep flock and regularly investigate the possibility of alternatives (particularly through changes to management techniques) to see if they can offer the same level of protection of health and welfare as the use of antimicrobials.
- Adequate training and good recording systems are essential to provide a framework for identifying disease problems and making the necessary changes to management practices. This can lead to a reduction in antimicrobial use. Staff working directly with animals should be trained to identify health problems early and in the use of veterinary medicines.