

## Who enforces the controls on the supply of pet medicines?

These controls are enforced in Great Britain by inspectors from the VMD, Animal Health Veterinary Laboratory Agency (AHVLA) – a Defra agency – and the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). In Northern Ireland the controls are enforced by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

## Can I buy medicines for my pet on the internet?

Yes you can, but it is important that you check to ensure that the site is UK based. If the medicine you wish to purchase requires a veterinary prescription, all reputable websites will ask for this prescription to be provided. Your vet will be able to provide you with a written prescription if you ask for it. If an internet retailer offers to sell you a prescription medicine without asking to see your prescription at any stage in the transaction, the sale will be illegal and you may also have committed an offence by purchasing the medicine.

NFA-VPS medicines do not need a prescription but should have advice accompanying them and you may be asked some questions about your pet (its weight, age etc) before completing your online purchase for these medicines.

AVM-GSL medicines and medicines under the Exemptions for small pet animals can be sold on the internet without any restrictions on who can buy or sell them.

To help you to buy safe and effective medicines on the internet the VMD has introduced its Accredited Internet Retailer Scheme. Details can be found on our website: [www.vmd.defra.gov.uk](http://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk) and in an information leaflet: Helping You to Buy Safe and Effective Veterinary Medicines on the Internet – the VMD's Accredited Internet Retailer Scheme

## What can I do to make sure that the medicine I give to my pet will be safe and effective?

Follow the instructions on the label and the instructions given to you by your vet or SQP. Even when a product has been authorised, it may only be safe and effective when it is used in accordance with the label instructions, which are checked and approved by the VMD.

## What about side effects?

Harmful unexpected side effects to veterinary medicines are rare. Companies who market animal medicines are required by law to report to the VMD any side effects they are told about. If you have any side effects after giving your pet a medicine, tell your doctor and take the packaging with you. If the pet has a reaction, tell your vet who will be able to advise you if your animal needs any further treatment. The VMD wants to know about such cases too and either you or your vet can report them to the manufacturer or to us directly online via the links on our website or by using a paper version of our reporting form. Our Pharmacovigilance Unit watches over the use of animal medicines by monitoring all reports of side effects or the medicine not working properly. This means we can spot and deal with possible problems with an animal medicine, and helps

ensure the safety of people and their pets. If you want to know more about this team's work, or if you want to use the online reporting form to report a side effect, you can visit our website [www.vmd.defra.gov.uk](http://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk) and click on the yellow 'Report an adverse event' tab under the Quick Links on the right hand side of the page.

If you have any difficulties you can phone us on 01932 338427. Alternatively, you can download a form from the same page to print out and fill in by hand and then send to the freepost address printed on the form.

## What can I do with any unused medicine?

There will be instructions on the product label or leaflet. If you obtained the medicine from your vet, return it to the veterinary practice for safe disposal, otherwise place the medicine in the rubbish bin ensuring that animals and children cannot reach it.

## Where can I find out more about my pet's medicine?

You can use the Product Information Database on the VMD website [www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/ProductInformationDatabase/](http://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/ProductInformationDatabase/)

You can use it to look up the name of the product in question and the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) and for products authorised after November 2005 the Public Assessment Report (PuAR) which will contain a large amount of information on your product.

Note: Products marketed under the Exemptions for small pet animals are not included on the Product Information Database.

There are further leaflets available in this series which are also available on the VMD website [www.vmd.defra.gov.uk](http://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk). These cover areas such as:

- The work of the VMD
- Availability of Veterinary Medicines
- Pharmacovigilance
- Vaccines for Cats and Dogs – Advice for Owners

**You can also phone the VMD on 01932 336911 for any additional assistance about veterinary medicines. Alternatively you can e-mail us at: [postmaster@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:postmaster@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk)**



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



# Is this medicine safe for my pet?



The Veterinary Medicines Directorate is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

## Is this medicine safe for my pet?

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) has produced this leaflet to tell pet owners about the high standards medicines for animals must meet before they are allowed to be sold as veterinary medicines in the UK. This means that pet owners can have confidence in the medicines they give to their pets.

## What is the VMD?

The VMD is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and aims to protect public health, animal health, and the environment and to promote animal welfare by assuring the safety, quality and efficacy of veterinary medicines. The VMD is responsible for developing and enforcing the legal controls for veterinary medicines in the UK. If you would like to know more about our work you can visit our website [www.vmd.defra.gov.uk](http://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk).

## Why control animal medicines?

The controls which VMD oversees protect the health of your pet, your own health and that of your family when using the medicine and they help to ensure the protection of the environment. Similar safeguards apply to medicines for farm animals so that the food that they produce is safe from any residues of veterinary medicines.

## What are the controls and how do they work?

Before a veterinary medicine can be sold or supplied in the UK, the VMD has to approve it. The medicine will need a Marketing Authorisation (MA), unless it comes under the Exemptions for small pet animals, is a registered homeopathic remedy or a nutritional supplement.

### • Marketing Authorisation (MA)

Anyone who wants to place a product on the UK market must demonstrate that it is of consistently high quality, is safe for the environment, animals and the owners who give their pets the medicine and that it will work as it is intended to. The Secretary of State for Defra will grant an MA only if the veterinarians and other scientists (pharmacists, chemists, toxicologists and eco-toxicologists) at the VMD are fully satisfied that the product meets the necessary standard. Special provisions are put in place on every veterinary medicine so that the VMD can check there are no problems with how the medicine is working or its safety. These checks continue for as long as the medicine continues to be sold in the UK.

### • Exemptions for small pet animals

Products which are exempt from the MA requirements under the Exemptions for small pet animals may only be used for the following species: aquarium animals, cage birds, homing pigeons, terrarium animals, small rodents, ferrets and rabbits. The exemption applies only to pet animals that are not intended to produce food for human consumption and these products can only be sold in small pack sizes under certain conditions.

### • Registered Veterinary Homeopathic Remedy

A veterinary homeopathic remedy must be registered with the VMD in order to be marketed, unless it has been specially prepared for a specific animal.

## How can I be sure that an animal medicine has been properly authorised?

Authorised medicines have to display a unique code number starting with Vm or EU for an authorised product, Vh for a registered homeopathic remedy, or will include a statement "This veterinary medicine is marketed in accordance with the Exemptions for small pet animals" or similar on the label and packaging. You should only buy or use these medicines. Unauthorised medicines may be harmful to you or your pet, and may be of little or no use for treating your animal. If in doubt consult your vet or pharmacist. Some medicines will also have the phrase "UK Authorised Veterinary Medicinal Product" or this logo so you can easily see that they have been authorised.



Where a suitable veterinary medicine is not authorised and available in the UK to treat a particular species or condition, a veterinary surgeon may follow the prescribing **cascade**. The prescribing cascade increases the range of medicines available to veterinary surgeons.

If you would like more information please see our leaflet, 'How to identify veterinary medicines: Legal or illegal?' and 'Availability of Veterinary Medicines'.

## What are the standards the VMD applies?

Before authorising any new veterinary medicine we examine all the evidence provided by the company on:

### • Quality

All medicines, including those for pets, must be manufactured in authorised premises to specifications approved by the VMD. This is to make sure that all batches of the product meet the necessary standards and are consistent. These standards are like those for human medicines and among other things they check that products are sterile if they need to be and that each tablet or bottle contains the correct amount of the active ingredient.

### • Safety

A medicine must be safe to use, without causing harm to the animal being treated, the people giving the animal the medicine or the environment. As with human medicines, many animal medicines can have side effects. These are carefully evaluated and the benefit of using the medicine must strongly outweigh any risks involved with its use. Human safety is always of paramount importance.

### • Efficacy

All medicines should do what they claim to do; as long as the instructions on the label are followed properly and they are given to the types of animal for which they were authorised. Sometimes your vet may give you special instructions to use the product in a different way than is described on the label. This is "off label use" and your vet should discuss the risks carefully with you in each case. Occasionally, your vet may need to get permission from the VMD to import a veterinary medicine if there isn't a suitable one available in the UK.

Note:- we do not assess safety, quality or efficacy for products marketed under the Exemptions for small pet animals.

The VMD works with similar agencies in other Member States in the European Union and with the European Medicines Agency to make sure that similar standards apply across Europe.

## Are there controls on how medicines for pet animals are manufactured and distributed?

Yes there are. All manufacturers, wholesalers and importers of veterinary medicines in the EU have to be authorised. Regular inspections are carried out to ensure that the required standards are maintained and that products are being produced, stored and handled properly. Authorisations can be taken away and the products withdrawn from sale if these standards fall below acceptable levels.

## Who can supply pet medicines?

There are four distribution categories for authorised pet medicines and they should be clearly labeled with AVM-GSL, NFA-VPS, POM-VPS or POM-V on the packaging:

### **Authorised Veterinary Medicine – General Sales List (AVM-GSL)**

These medicines can be sold in any retail outlet, such as a pet shop or supermarket. They are suitable for sale and use without veterinary supervision or advice from a pharmacist or other specially trained people (e.g. a Suitably Qualified Person (SQP)) as long as the product is used as directed on the label. Examples include certain flea products.

### **Non-Food Animal – Veterinarian, Pharmacist, Suitably Qualified Person (NFA-VPS)**

These medicines can be sold to pet owners by registered veterinary surgeons, pharmacists or SQPs. These SQPs have had special training and passed exams on the correct use of these types of medicines. Examples are certain dog, cat or horse wormers. The sale will only be made if the pet owner is known to have a dog, cat or horse.

### **Prescription Only Medicine – Veterinarian, Pharmacist, Suitably Qualified Person (POM-VPS)**

There are a few veterinary medicines for pets that are included in this category. They can be sold to pet owners by registered veterinary surgeons, pharmacists or SQPs. The animal does not need to be seen by the prescriber but sufficient information about the animal is required in order to prescribe and supply the appropriate veterinary medicine.

**Exemption for small pet animals** Animal medicines which are exempt under the Exemptions for small pet animals may be sold or supplied in retail outlets such as a pet shop or supermarket.

Medicines obtained from other sources may be illegal and may be dangerous to your pet if they have not been manufactured from the correct ingredients.