

Advertise veterinary medicines legally

How veterinary medicines can be advertised.

This is for vets, suitably qualified persons (SQPs), pharmacists, marketing authorisation holders (MAHs), manufacturers of veterinary medicines and wholesale dealer authorisation (WDA) holders.

This provides guidance on the advertising restrictions on veterinary medicine in the UK.

This guidance refers to the following distribution categories:

- Prescription Only Medicine – Veterinarian (POM-V)
- Prescription Only Medicine – Veterinarian, Pharmacist, SQP (POM-VPS)
- Non-Food Animal – Veterinarian, Pharmacist, SQP (NFA-VPS)
- Authorised Veterinary Medicine – General Sales List (AVM-GSL)

The [Veterinary Medicines Regulations \(VMR\)](#), as amended, set out restrictions on who may advertise veterinary medicines and to what audience.

You must not advertise a veterinary medicine that:

- does not hold a current UK or GB marketing authorisation (unless it is marketed in accordance with the exemptions for small pet animals), which includes:
 - medicines with suspended marketing authorisations
 - extemporaneously prepared products (also known as specials)
 - human medicines
 - medicines imported under the Special Import Scheme
- is only available on prescription (POM-V, POM-VPS and products prescribed under the cascade) to the general public

An advertisement for a veterinary medicine, intermediate feedingstuffs and compound feed, (but not coccidiostats or histomonostats) must:

- make clear that the message is an advertisement for the purpose of promoting the supply, sale, prescription, distribution or use of the product
- encourage responsible use of the product
- present the product in an objective manner
- ensure that all factual statements are consistent with the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) for the product
- not contain information that:
 - is misleading
 - makes a claim that is not in line with its SPC
 - may encourage improper use
 - might suggest a veterinary medicine is a feedingstuff or a biocide

- for prescription medicines: include a statement that “prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone”

You can find the full requirements under Regulations:

- 10, Advertising the Product
- 10A, Inducements and hospitality
- 11, Advertising of prescription products and products containing psychotropic drugs or narcotics
- 12, Defence of publication in the course of business

The offences for non-compliance with these requirements are under Regulation 43, (f), (fa) and (g).

If you think an advert for a veterinary medicine doesn't comply with the VMR, report it to enforcement@vmd.gov.uk.

What is considered advertising

Advertising is any activity in connection with a veterinary medicine that is aimed or designed to promote the sale, distribution, supply, prescription or use of the veterinary medicine, whether for profit or not. This includes supply of samples or sponsorship for those purposes.

This also applies to electronic advertising, for example, website banners, emails. Some examples of types of promotional adverts are:

- mail shot emails to customers
- postal flyers
- website banners or pop ups
- sponsored banners on internet search engines
- text providing information about animal illnesses that specifically promotes a particular veterinary medicine
- presentations and other verbal communications

What is not considered advertising

General public

Educational information aimed at giving a balanced overview of a disease and all available treatments may be made available to the general public as long as:

- products or brand names of prescription medicines are not mentioned
- all other advertising restrictions are met

Educational information may name active substances and contain a small strap line at the top or bottom of the article stating ‘this information was provided by [company] makers of [product]’

Vets

Educational information on treatment options and opinions on authorised medicines used in accordance with their SPC may be made available to vets.

Educational information on treatment options and opinions on medicines prescribed under the cascade, for example, authorised medicines used outside the terms of the SPC, human medicines or extemporaneous products, may be made available to vets, providing that:

- the material does not reference product names, including brand and trade names, although active ingredients can be referenced
- the material does not reference a company or business
- no company or product-specific recommendations or endorsements are given
- presentations are unbiased and factual
- all other advertising restrictions are met

The use of pictures of veterinary medicines in presentations must comply with the advertising restrictions. For example, there should not be brand names or company logos visible in pictures of products not authorised in the UK or products being used under the prescribing cascade.

It is considered good practice for vets to declare any affiliations to pharmaceutical companies when presenting treatment options and opinions to vets at conferences or training events.

Advertising prescription medicines

You can only advertise veterinary medicines classed as POM-V in promotions aimed at the following:

- vets
- pharmacists
- vet nurses
- professional keepers of animals – this excludes antibiotic medicines which are prohibited from being advertised to professional keepers of animals, including farmers

You can only advertise veterinary medicines classed as POM-VPS in promotions aimed at the following:

- vets
- pharmacists
- suitably qualified persons
- other veterinary health care professionals
- professional keepers of animals

Advertising non-prescription medicines

There are no restrictions on the advertising of veterinary medicines classified as NFA-VPS and AVM-GSL as long as the:

- information in the advert isn't misleading
- claims are accurately taken from the products' SPCs

There are no restrictions on the advertising of products that come under the [exemptions for small pet animals](#).

Price lists

Price lists are not considered as advertising material as long as all products are listed with equal prominence. You must do all of the following to avoid your price list being classed as an advert:

- include a list of all products in a particular category, for example all prescription wormers
- use the same size text and images for all products
- use consistent font size, colour and formatting
- only use images that show the medicine with UK authorised packaging
- refer to the product by its full authorised name

You should also make sure the name of each medicine, its image and a description is in line with the product's SPC.

Online search engines

Sponsored/paid for adverts on internet search engines are by definition an advertisement and therefore fall under the advertising restrictions set down in the VMR.

However, we recognise that search engines are a useful tool to help customers to shop online efficiently. Therefore, we consider it acceptable for online retailers to use these adverts to direct customers to their websites in response to a search for a specific POM-V or POM-VPS medicines.

However, the use of non-specific terms to advertise prescription veterinary medicines is not acceptable. For example, if a customer searches for the specific name of a prescription medicine in a search engine, an online retailer may name only that product and the price in the advert to direct the customer to their site. If a customer uses non-specific search terms such as 'arthritis in dogs' or 'feline kidney problems' this should not result in prescription medicines being advertised.

Medicine selection

You must use medicines based on their medical suitability rather than for any financial gain. Suppliers of medicines should not undertake promotions such as discounts or 'buy one get one free' to try to influence prescribers of medicines.

Support advertising claims

If you are a product's marketing authorisation holder you must make sure that any advertising claims you make are supported by information in the product's SPC.

Antimicrobial products

For the purpose of this provision, antimicrobials mean antibiotics, which are antibacterial in their action. All antibiotic products authorised in the UK are POM-V. Promotion of antibiotics should not encourage unnecessary use of these medicines and all advertising material should contain a strap line indicating that the prescription and use of the medicine should be in accordance with the responsible use of antibiotics.

For example:

- Use antibiotics responsibly
- Accurate prescribing and administration helps to reduce resistance

The National Office of Animal Health ([NOAH](#)) has also published additional [guidance on antibiotics](#). This includes the requirement for NOAH members to use the strapline “use medicines responsibly”.

Wholesale dealer authorisation holders

Wholesale dealers may only send a price list of authorised human medicines to a vet for use under the [cascade](#) following a request from the prescribing vet.

The list must follow the standard price list guidance, and must clearly state that the products do not have a veterinary marketing authorisation and that they should only be prescribed and administered under the cascade.

A wholesale dealer can provide an electronic ordering system of products available under a [special import certificate](#) for veterinary surgeons, provided the standard price list guidance is followed, and subject to the following:

- the ordering system is not available to the general public and requires the vet to login
- special import products are listed in a separate area of the ordering system
- listings must not include any pictures or photos of the product, but a generic picture of a bottle or blister pack can be used, this image should be the same size for all listings
- information on the products indication, distribution category, manufacturer and approved species should not be displayed
- package leaflet and SPCs should not be published, but can be provided to customers upon request

The listing must only comprise of the following:

- the name of the product
- the product composition
- the licence number
- the country of origin
- the pack size
- the price

- a disclaimer that ‘this product does not hold a veterinary marketing authorisation in the UK’

Manufacturers of extemporaneous preparations for use under the cascade

Manufacturers of extemporaneous preparations, also known as veterinary specials, must not advertise or promote the specific substances they can manufacture. However, they may:

- provide a price list of active substances and formulations to a vet but only on request, provided it follows the standard price list guidance such as having consistent font size, colour and formatting
- advertise the services they provide and the different types of dosage forms and routes of administration that are available, for example capsule, syrup, injectable, ear spray, oral drench
- provide placebo samples to a vet enquiring about their services

They must not make medicinal claims or refer to specific diseases or conditions.

Brand names and trade names cannot be used.

Inducements and hospitality

When you promote veterinary medicines to persons qualified to prescribe or supply them, you cannot offer or promise any:

- gift
- monetary advantage
- benefit in kind

Unless the gift, monetary advantage or benefit in kind is inexpensive and relevant to practicing veterinary medicine or pharmacy.

This means any promotional activity which encourages the purchase or supply of veterinary medicines must be inexpensive and relevant.

This includes loyalty schemes that reward the purchase of larger volumes of veterinary medicines through discounts, investment opportunities or personal reward, or any other scheme that offers a benefit which is not inexpensive or relevant.

To comply with the requirement to be ‘inexpensive and relevant’ the item or benefit must:

- relate to the practice of veterinary medicine, such as educational material or items that relate to the responsible use of the product, or
- have a clear business use, such as pens, notepads or computer accessories.

These should represent minimal cost to the supplier and represent a similar minimal cost to the recipient.

Hospitality

This does not prevent you from offering hospitality, including travelling or accommodation expenses, to vets, SQPs or pharmacists at an event that is purely for professional or scientific purposes, or to animal health professionals at a meeting or event held for the promotion of veterinary medicines.

Hospitality should be reasonable in level, and must be:

- subordinate to the main objective of the event
- only offered to animal health professionals

No vet, SQP or pharmacist may solicit or accept any gift, monetary advantage, benefit in kind, hospitality or sponsorship prohibited under the VMR.

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