



New Antibiotic REGULATIONS

Submitted by Drs. Mark and Dana Bergen

Lately, we have been getting a lot of questions and feedback regarding the new federal antibiotic regulations for livestock producers that come into effect December 1, 2018. I am sure many livestock producers have concerns. Our clients are worried that they will have a hard time getting antibiotics when they need them, they are worried that every sick animal will need to be examined before they can get a prescription, and they are worried that drug prices will go up. For most of our clients and producers in B.C. the new regulations will not lead to many changes.

Currently, any prescription antibiotic needs veterinary approval before it may be sold to a livestock producer. Each animal does not need to be examined if a valid Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR) exists. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association determines that a legitimate VCPR is considered to exist only if medical records of the practice contain sufficient evidence of relevant and timely interaction between the veterinarian, animal owner and animal patients. As a minimum a veterinarian should have an in depth discussion and a file regarding your herd and management of the herd (health history and risk, vaccinations, etc.) and reassess this on an annual basis. Best treatment for each disease process seen in the herd should be discussed. Sometimes a formal, written VCPR agreement may be made and signed. Most clients that do business with a veterinary clinic will have a VCPR. Those that make infrequent visits and only buy non-prescription products may need to start a relationship with a veterinarian if they anticipate a need for prescriptions in the future.

Currently, some antibiotics are available through livestock supply stores like Peavey Mart and Co-op. Penicillin (Derapen, Pen G, etc.) and Oxytetracycline (Oxyvet, Liquamycin, etc.) and other antibiotic preparations, like some scour boluses, will be considered prescription and will

no longer be available at these stores as of December 1. All antibiotics that are mixed in feed at feed mills will require a prescription as well. Implants that contain an antibiotic will become prescription. Ionophores such as Rumensin and Bovetec will still be available without a prescription. Claims for antibiotics used for growth promotion will be dropped from labels. Changes will be made to the labels of medically important antimicrobials, which are used for the most serious types of infections in human medicine.

Because veterinary clinics and pharmacies will be the only place that these antibiotics are available there has been some concern that prices will rise. The regulations are a government initiative at the federal level and they are not about bringing vets more business or about driving the price of antibiotics up. Currently, most veterinary clinics carry the products that most livestock supply stores do or may stock them as the need arises. Most veterinary clinics buy these antibiotics through a veterinary distributor, and the distributor buys them from the manufacturer. At our clinic we sometimes need to adjust prices if the price from the distributor goes up. I would think if the manufacturers and distributors have fewer retailers (no more supply stores) to ship to and volume of sales are not greatly affected that will simplify things, be a cost savings

for them, and should not lead to a price rise. I guess only time will tell. It is possible that individual clinics may increase prices of these antibiotics to cover the cost of time spent establishing and updating VCPR and filling prescriptions if this gets to be a huge time commitment.

There have been some questions about why we need the changes and are they necessary? Currently, a working group in Canada (Canadian Integrated Program for Antimicrobial) has been collecting samples from abattoirs and food retailers since 2002. There has been negligible evidence of increased antibiotic resistance from these studies. This is good news but is not by any means diagnostic for the whole livestock industry and is only a tiny piece of the whole picture. At the global level, antibiotic resistance has been on the rise. The World Health Organization says that “resistance is rising to dangerously high levels and without urgent action, we are heading for a post-antibiotic era, in which common infections and minor injuries can once again kill.” We are just a piece of the pie when it comes to antibiotic use. Doctors, hospitals, pharmacists, drug manufacturers and distributors and even the patient all play a role in responsible antibiotic use. All sectors are evaluating their potential contribution to resistance and setting stricter regulations as to use. In places where antibiotics can be bought for human

and animal use without a prescription, the development of resistant microbes is worse. There is a global movement with developed countries leading the initiative.

I anticipate some frustration regarding the new regulations until we all get used to how things are going to work. A few things that may help would be to take time to set up an appointment for a visit or phone conversation with your veterinarian prior to December 1 to make sure you have a valid VCPR. An ideal time for this would be at fall preg checking. Call ahead when wanting to purchase antibiotics if you are unsure if you have approval for the specific antibiotic. Starting December 1, your veterinarian, with a valid VCPR, may approve a certain amount of specific antibiotics that are consistent with your herd size and disease risk that can be used up to a year before renewal. Such an agreement is under the discretion of your veterinarian. Please have patience with front end staff as they will not be able to sell you the antibiotic unless they have veterinary approval. They are not being difficult, they are just doing their job.

Overall, I think these changes will be good. Many producers will benefit from having a closer relationship with their veterinarian. Discussion regarding herd health, disease prevention and more prudent use of antibiotics will benefit individual herds and the industry as a whole. Using the antibiotic that is most appropriate for the disease, is given by the appropriate route, and with the appropriate withdrawal time is crucial for successful treatment. There are four categories of antibiotics used in cattle products. Category 1 includes those with very high importance in human medicine and are used for the most serious infections. There are limited or no effective alternatives available in this class. Limiting the use of Category 1 antibiotics in livestock will help prevent resistance in this important class.

In the past, there was nothing in place to prevent anyone from entering a supply store and purchasing available antibiotics to use however they saw fit. Over the years, I have heard stories of personal use, use on animals that the antibiotics were not intended for, etc. I am sure there is more

of that going on than we know and these are the types of things that can really cause problems long term and will be prevented with the new regulations.

Change is hard but looking to the future and doing all we can to ensure we do not lose the important tool we call antibiotics is so important. We live in a gifted age and cannot imagine being a veterinarian or livestock producer where infectious disease was untreatable. A more disturbing scenario would be having a resistant infection or having a loved one hospitalized with a resistant infection and no cure. Small changes today are worth preventing potential catastrophic outcomes in the future.

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