Red Tractor Antibiotic standards changes Q&A

Red Tractor made some changes to the Beef and Lamb and Dairy standards in June 2018 to demonstrate responsible use of medicines.

This document covers the answers to some of the common questions which have been received regarding the changes.

Highest Priority Critically Important Antibiotics

From 1st June 2018 standard AM.a.1 has been upgraded to a full requirement in the Beef and Lamb and Dairy schemes. The standard states:

AM.a.1 Highest Priority Critically Important Antibiotics must only be used as a last resort under veterinary direction

- HP-CIAs are defined by the European Medicines Agency as 3rd and 4th generation cephalosporins, fluoroquinolones and Colistin
- Use is supported by a vet report outlining one or more of the following:
    - Sensitivity testing
    - Diagnostic testing

Record requirement: Vet report outlining sensitivity test reports/diagnostic test reports

Can diagnostic/sensitivity testing be carried out in parallel with treatment?

At no time should welfare be adversely affected as a result of this standard (or any other). However, there is limited evidence that withholding these treatments adversely affects welfare. Treatment with HP-CIAs in parallel with diagnostic/sensitivity testing can be used where previous sensitivity testing shows that HP-CIAs are the only antibiotics likely to show a satisfactory response for a specified condition. However, in this scenario, the new case of this condition must be appropriately tested to demonstrate a continued requirement to use these products.

What constitutes diagnostic testing?

Diagnostic testing refers to the process by which you as a vet conclude that an HP-CIA is the last resort option. This could be through pen-side diagnostic tests, as and when they become available. It is likely that the diagnostic testing will be supported by C&S testing to confirm that the bacteria being treated is susceptible to the antibiotic that has been prescribed, and in the case of HP-CIAs they represent the only licensed option for that condition in that animal. Clinical diagnosis alone is not sufficient and

selection cannot be based on other parameters such as withhold periods, route of administration or frequency of administration.

What will an assessor be looking for to confirm that diagnostic/sensitivity testing has been undertaken and that the CIA was the only option?

A vet report must be available on farm with results showing that the diagnostic testing/sensitivity testing has been carried out. If the diagnostic/sensitivity testing was carried out in parallel with the treatment, to ensure welfare was not adversely affected, the results might show that the CIA was not the only viable option. If this is the case, this should be used to inform future prescribing procedures e.g. the next time an animal has similar symptoms, an alternative course of treatment is prescribed and administered.

What if a prescription was given prior to June 1st but the course length carries over past June 1st? Should this prescription be backed up with testing?

No. If the prescription and purchase pre-dates the standards change then testing is not required, but best practice would be that even in these circumstances the HP-CIAs are used as a last resort. The BCVA have been recommending the use of HP-CIAs only after C&S testing demonstrates they are the only suitable choice since December 2016. After 1st September all HP-CIA use must be as a last resort demonstrated by the relevant testing regardless of the purchase and prescription date.

Can a vet use results from diagnostic/sensitivity testing from a previous treatment to demonstrate the need for the use of an HP-CIA?

Welfare must not be adversely affected by the need for testing to demonstrate HP-CIAs are being used as a last resort. Therefore, previous testing can be used to inform a decision to use an HP-CIA for a specific condition in a specific group of animals, but additional testing must be carried out to demonstrate continued need for the use of these products. Use of HP-CIAs must also be reviewed as part of the annual vet health and performance review/antibiotic review.

What happens if a farm is prescribed and uses an HP-CIA after the 1st June without required testing?

In this situation, a farm would get a non-conformance and would have 28 days to send in corrective evidence to the certification body. The corrective evidence required is likely to be a letter from the vet to confirm that in the future HP-CIAs will only be prescribed and used as a last resort and where their use is backed up by the required testing. Providing this evidence is sent in to the certification body within the 28 days, the farm's certification will not be affected. However, if a farm repeatedly uses HP-CIAs in this way then it is likely to impact certification.

What about when sensitivity test is not accurate i.e. comes back and says other drugs should be used, but in practice they are ineffective?

In the absence of laboratory confirmation of resistance to other licensed products, best practice would be to send a dossier of evidence of suspected lack of efficacy to the other available products reported to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. A written explanation should be provided for the farmer to keep for the assessment as to why the HP-CIA has been prescribed and what steps have been taken to identify it as a drug of last resort.

Is there a template available for vets to use when justifying the use of an HP-CIA?

Yes. Red Tractor have produced a template as a guide which can be used to demonstrate compliance with the standard. Vets can also use their own templates/documents.

Who is ultimately responsible for meeting the standard?

As the member of the Red Tractor scheme the farmer is ultimately responsible for meeting the standard. The vet holds the ultimate responsibility for prescribing of antibiotics therefore, the vet/farmer relationship is key to ensuring responsible use of antimicrobials.

Staff Training

From October 2017, a recommendation was added into the Dairy scheme which recommends that at least one member of staff responsible for handling and administering medicines has undertaken training. This recommendation was replicated in the Beef and Lamb Scheme from June 2018. Whilst Red Tractor is not providing a definitive list of what must be included in such a course, the following could be considered for inclusion:

- Responsible use of medicines:
    - Purchasing routes
    - Storage conditions
    - Recording requirements
    - Administration routes
    - Avoiding residues
    - Vaccination
- Trace element supplementation
- Anthelmintics

An industry course; 'Animal Medicines Best Practice Project', has also been developed, facilitated by NOAH which will be launched in July. Completion of this course will meet the Red Tractor recommendation.