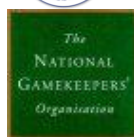




**Game Feed
Trade
Association**



Important Joint Communication: Spring 2018

REDUCING ANTIBIOTIC USE IN GAMEBIRDS

This important joint communication is intended for all UK gamebird rearers, any shoots that release game, game feed suppliers, vets who look after gamebirds and everyone else with an interest in gamebird husbandry and game shooting. It comes from an unprecedented range of professional and representative bodies, whose logos appear above. It is also supported by specialist gamebird veterinary practices and by many suppliers of gamebirds and game feeds. Please read it carefully and take action.

There is worldwide concern about the increased resistance of many infections to antibiotics (ABs). Unless we act now, human deaths associated with anti-microbial resistance could rise to 10 million a year by 2050 – more than currently die from cancer. Without AB cover, surgical operations could become as hazardous as in history. And, if AB's are rendered ineffective, diseases of the birds and animals we look after could become untreatable. Together, we have to stop this happening.

Anti-microbial resistance is a natural process but is accelerated by over-use and incorrect use of antibiotics. Alongside other Governments, the UK is now fully committed to reducing antibiotic use in humans and animals. The NHS and all livestock sectors are now signed up to their own ambitious AB reduction targets. The gamebird sector is no different and set its own reduction targets for the first time last year.

The good news is that with the help of many of you, we smashed our 25% reduction target for 2017, achieving a 36% reduction in just one year, with the use of antibiotics in game feeds falling by an impressive 53%. We were highly commended by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and by Ministers for this and we thank everyone who played a part. But it is only a start. The bad news is that ours remains a high usage sector and we need to carry on reducing our AB's as quickly as we can without compromising animal welfare. The World Health Organisation and others have made it quite clear that if AB use cannot be cut voluntarily across all livestock sectors, regulation will have to follow.

So, with the help of specialist vets, we have set a further game sector target: to reduce AB use in UK gamebirds by at least another 25% between now and the end of 2020. For the sake of human and animal health, for the good of our own gamebirds and – not least – for the reputation of game shooting, we must achieve this. And, with everyone working together, we will. Our five point plan for reducing antibiotics in 2018 is as follows:

1. Best Possible Gamebird Management to Reduce Disease and the Need for Antibiotics

Gamebirds are usually produced outside and are thus exposed to diseases from wild birds and other vectors. They are also at the mercy of the weather. Diseases of the gut are particularly common and regrettably there are very few medicines licensed specifically for treating gamebird disease. For some gamebird managers, perhaps most, antibiotics have become regarded as a 'solution' to these difficulties, although in fact ABs cannot directly cure gut parasites such as hexamita.

A much better approach is to get biosecurity and game management right in the first place, making it harder for disease to establish and ensuring that conditions are such that, if it does, it will not thrive. This requires a healthy parent flock, clean disease-free eggs, lower stocking densities, quality food and the avoidance of damp ground on the rearing field. At the shoot end, it means quality release pens with the right mix of habitats and no standing water. These things can go a long way to reducing any need for antibiotics.

Recent membership magazines of BASC, the GFA, the NGO and the SGA have all included articles and case studies about such techniques, as have many of the shooting magazines. The best place for gamebird keepers to start is to work up a health plan with a specialist gamebird vet, who will be well acquainted with the need to reduce antibiotics and the best ways to achieve it.

2. Best Practice in Prescribing ABs

Best practice in prescribing antibiotics was the focus of a similar Joint Communication this time last year – and it made a huge difference. Referencing the relevant Veterinary Medicines Regulations and the prescribing requirements of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the BVA, we clearly established that:

“ABs for incorporation into gamebird feed should not be prescribed at all unless the birds in question have been visited by the vet responsible for them or a clinical assessment of the birds has been undertaken by the vet (e.g. post mortem examination) and a need to prescribe AB has been established.” (For more detail, see the Annex below).

All the main gamebird veterinary practices supported this position as did the entire game feed trade, hence the 53% reduction in ABs incorporated in game feed in 2017. We now need to complete the implementation of this principle and in particular to ensure that vets without specialist experience and knowledge do not prescribe inappropriately to gamebirds. Gamebird managers are encouraged to select and to stay with a specialist gamebird practice whose vets are familiar with gamebird management and diseases and also the prescribing implications of the above principle and the 'cascade' system.

This year, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons is fully aware of our campaign, whilst the relevant enforcement body - the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) - has leant its support and will be following events closely.

3. Recording all AB use and Monitoring Bird Welfare

All keepers and rearers of gamebirds must retain records of any antibiotic administration: it is a legal requirement. It also helps good management and it allows national monitoring of AB usage so we can measure our progress against our sector reduction target. But as we strive to reduce antibiotics, we also need to record and monitor gamebird health. Welfare is paramount and we need evidence of where AB is absolutely necessary as well as knowing where it is not. Vets in particular can help in gathering this information and we will arrange a de-brief meeting at the end of the 2018 releasing season, just as we did last year, where the industry can look back and learn collectively from individual experiences.

4. Helping Each Other: “We are all in this together”

We need to face the challenge of reducing antibiotics collectively and that means helping each other. Please share relevant information, whether it is between veterinarians, game farmers or from game farmers to shoots. Be open about disease issues and the treatments used. If you think someone is doing wrong or using AB unnecessarily, say so. If you have had particular problems or successes, tell others about them. Attend relevant meetings and keep abreast of developing news. Alert others who may not have heard about this campaign or not seen this Joint Communication. Explain that, ‘We are all in this together!’

5. Clamping down on unlawful AB supply and incorrect use

Finally, we also need to cooperate to stamp out unlawful supplies of antibiotics and/or their incorrect use. Using antibiotics in birds for which they have not been prescribed is illegal; so too is keeping medicated feed on the farm without a prescription for specific birds. (Compounding medicated feed does take time but to avoid the temptation to hoard medicated rations on the farm ‘just in case’, this year feed manufacturers have agreed to keep a legal tonnage of medicated feed ready in their mills for when an emergency prescription comes in). Note that it is generally illegal for game rearers to supply medicated feed or soluble ABs along with poults and that under the ‘cascade’ system, withdrawal periods before shooting can commence are usually 28 days after last treatment. Do not be tempted to buy antibiotics online or accept illegal antibiotics supplied with imported birds.

If you think someone is breaking the law please report them, either to one of the organisations named above or direct to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/report-a-problem>

Thank you for reading this and please take whatever action you can to reduce antibiotic use in 2018. It won’t always be easy but at the end of the day, it will be good for us all.

Annex:

Best Practice Procedure for Antibiotic Prescribing in Gamebirds

(Extracted from last year's Joint Communication)

- For the purposes of prescribing, all kept gamebirds must be “under the care” of a qualified veterinary surgeon. This means the vet has been given responsibility for the health of the flock by the owner. That vet must see the flock immediately before prescribing or have visited recently enough to make a diagnosis and prescribe¹.
- Correct husbandry and management should always be in place and will reduce the need for medication and treatment².
- Bird keepers must talk to their vet to establish whether there is a need to prescribe ABs *before* asking a feed company to compound rations containing medication³.
- Medicines prescribed under the ‘cascade’ system (which covers most of those used in gamebirds) can only be administered by a vet or someone directed by him or her and acting under his responsibility⁴.
- ‘Cascade’ medication is “in particular for the avoidance of unnecessary suffering”⁵.
- ABs must always be prescribed in response to a specific need arising in the birds in question. They should never be used as a matter of habit or a substitute for good bird management⁶.
- Where prescription of ABs is indicated, it must be for specific circumstances and for the exact amount necessary to resolve the problem⁷.
- Owners should be advised on correct administration and storage of products, and appropriate withdrawal periods⁸.
- ABs must never be wasted or allowed to pollute the environment. Unused ABs must not be flushed to the sewer and should be disposed of as pharmaceutical waste⁹.
- Any antibiotic use MUST be recorded¹⁰.

It follows from the above that:

- **ABs for incorporation into gamebird feed should not be prescribed at all unless the birds in question have been visited by the vet responsible for them, or a clinical assessment of birds has been undertaken by him (e.g post mortem examination) *and* a need to prescribe AB has been established.**

¹ Veterinary Medicines Regulations, 2013 and RCVS Guidance on ‘Animals [under the care](#)’.

² Animal Welfare Act, 2006 and Government Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes, 2009.

³ Medicated Feedstuffs Prescriptions Code of Practice, 2014 (Agreed by VMD,BVA,AIC,NFU and RCVS)

⁴ Veterinary Medicines Regulations, 2013.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ [BVA responsible use of anti-microbials in veterinary practice 7 point plan](#)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Environmental Protection Act, 1990 and Hazardous Waste Regulations, 2005.

¹⁰ VMD Code of Practice on the Responsible Use of Medicines on the Farm, 2014.