

WHY FOOD-PRODUCING ANIMALS NEED MEDICINES

Fact sheet



Animals need to be in good health to provide safe and nutritious food products. Like people, animals get sick and need medicines too.

Veterinarians work with farmers to ensure that food-producing animals - e.g. cattle, pigs, poultry, sheep and goats, etc. - are kept in good health, a pre-condition for animal welfare.

- **By preventing or treating diseases, veterinary medicines contribute to improving and maintaining animal health and welfare, as well as public health**
- **Veterinary medicines are licenced tools for veterinarians and farmers to safeguard animal health on farm as part of an animal health plan**
- **Healthy animals enable farmers to produce and supply food in a sustainable way**

Veterinary medicines support good animal health

Thanks to the use of veterinary medicines Europe has been successful in preventing and managing animal diseases such as bluetongue, bovine mastitis, circovirus, foot-and-mouth disease, and salmonella, which just years ago posed serious threats to animal health, food safety and public health.

Veterinary medicines (also called 'animal health products') are licenced, which means they must be proven to be of high quality, safe and effective against diseases in animals before being allowed onto the market. They include pharmaceuticals, vaccines and certain feed additives. By preventing or treating diseases, medicines contribute to improving and maintaining the health and welfare of animals, as well as public health.

Veterinary medicines enable veterinarians and farmers to safeguard animal health on farms as part of an animal health plan. This plan aims to achieve best practice in farm and health management, and encompasses good biosecurity¹, housing and ventilation, hygiene, nutrition and regular health monitoring, as well as the responsible use of veterinary medicines to prevent and treat diseases.

Animal health contributes to animal welfare

Animal health is a pre-condition for animal welfare. EU legislation² lays down the obligation for farmers to care for animals that appear to be ill or injured, and to obtain veterinary advice if necessary.

The animal health industry provides a broad variety of medicines that support animal welfare. Additionally, our industry strives to research and develop innovative products that will ensure healthy, well-nourished, animals living free of pain, suffering or distress. The animal health industry remains aware of future critical disease challenges and strives to continue developing advanced solutions that protect both animal and human health.

¹ A set of preventative measures aiming to keep groups of animals healthy or to limit the spread of diseases within an animal population.

² Council Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes.

Healthy animals for a healthier world

In addition to improving the health and welfare of food-producing animals, veterinary medicines contribute to the provision of safe, secure and sustainable food, and support public health.

- **Safe food only comes from healthy animals:** Veterinary medicines contribute to the safety and quality of animal products and, very importantly, they protect consumers from harmful food-borne pathogens or zoonotic agents³. Examples are the success of vaccination against salmonella in poultry and treatment of bovine mastitis.
- **Secure and sustainable food supply:** The OIE has reported that diseases in food-producing animals globally amount to a loss of 20% in production. Veterinary medicines support the provision of high quality animal produce such as meat, milk, eggs and fish across Europe and beyond. The role of animal health will become increasingly important in the future as demand for animal protein is expected to double by 2050, and 70% of this additional food supply will have to come from modern technologies according to the FAO.

Although they represent a small proportion of agricultural input costs (on average less than 2%), veterinary medicines enable farmers to produce high quality animal produce on an efficient and sustainable basis, to minimise the impact on the environment and to compete internationally.

- **Animal health + human health = one health:** According to the OIE, of the nearly 1,500 infectious diseases affecting people, almost two thirds can pass between animals and people – called ‘zoonoses’. Additionally, 75% of emerging infections amongst humans are believed to have originated in animals⁴. The prevention and treatment of animal diseases such as salmonella help protect humans.

Some facts on animal diseases

Bluetongue: Prevention and control measures such as use of vaccines in sheep in particular have enabled Europe to dramatically reduce the number of bluetongue outbreaks.

Bovine mastitis: The availability of a successful mastitis treatment has had a positive impact on the welfare of cows as well as the quality of their milk.

Circovirus: The introduction of vaccines against circovirus in pigs has seen a dramatic reduction in deaths, down to levels seen prior to the epidemic, along with a general improvement in health on pig farms.

Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD): The animal health industry has developed antigens tailored to the specific requirements of each FMD strain and the EU maintains one of the world's largest antigen banks for rapid formulation of vaccines in the event of an outbreak.

Salmonella: The successful use of vaccines against salmonella in poultry has contributed to reducing human cases by almost 50% in the EU since 2004.

Useful links

- IFAH-Europe: [food-producing animals](#) and [success stories](#)
- [European Platform for the Responsible Use of Medicines in Animals: www.epruma.eu](#)
IFAH white papers: [The costs of animal disease](#) and [emerging and re-emerging animal diseases – overcoming barriers to disease control](#)
- FVE brochure: [Veterinarians – vital for animals, vital for people](#)
- NOAH (UK) video: [Animal medicines in food production – the food industry perspective](#)

IFAH-Europe is the representative body of manufacturers of veterinary medicines, vaccines and other animal health products in Europe. IFAH-Europe's membership covers 90% of the European market for veterinary products. Member companies invest over €400 million in research and development every year. IFAH-Europe promotes a single market in veterinary medicines across the EU ensuring the availability of medicines to protect the health and welfare of animals.

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³ A disease that is transmissible between animals and humans, also called ‘zoonosis’.

⁴ Cleaveland S, Laurenson MK, Taylor LH. Diseases of humans and their domestic mammals: pathogen characteristics, host range and the risk of emergency. Philos Trans Roy Soc Lond B: Biol Sci 2001;356(1411):991–9.