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trading standards law explained

Keeping veterinary medicine records

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England

A record must be kept of the proof-of-purchase of all veterinary medicines bought for food-producing animals, as well as a record of all veterinary medicines administered to such animals. Records must be kept for five years.

Animals may be sent for slaughter only after the end of the withdrawal period.

Further information can be obtained from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

Reasons for record keeping

There are three reasons for keeping and retaining veterinary medicine records:

- To assist in ensuring that animal products for human use are safe and free from veterinary drug residues. This includes meat and all other products - for example, milk, eggs, honey and wool
- To provide a record that livestock and other creatures have been treated in a timely and appropriate manner to prevent them being subjected to unnecessary suffering

- To record that veterinary medicines have been obtained from a legitimate source, that they have been used correctly in accordance with the product licence provisions (except where otherwise directed by a veterinary surgeon) and any that are not used have been disposed of in an appropriate manner

What records must be kept and how

If you are the keeper of food-producing animals, or treat farm animals that will end up as food intended for human consumption, you must keep a record of the proof-of-purchase of all veterinary medicinal products bought for those animals, and a record of any veterinary medicinal products you give them or treat them with. If you did not buy the products yourself, you must keep documentary evidence of how you acquired them.

A format for the keeping of these records is set out on the attached record keeping document.

Any person required to keep a record must retain that record for a period of five years following the administration or other disposal of the product.

Animals can only be sent to slaughter after the end of the withdrawal period of the veterinary medicinal product that has been administered.

A record must also be maintained of any medicinal treatment given to animals that are bred or kept for the production of food, wool, skin or other farming purposes, and the number of mortalities found on each inspection.

If a veterinary surgeon administers a veterinary medicinal product to a food-producing animal, they must either enter the information in the keeper's records or give it to the keeper in writing (in which case the keeper must enter the details required in their records).

Proof of purchase must be retained for at least five years.

Disposal of unwanted veterinary medicinal products

A keeper who disposes of any veterinary medicinal products other than by treating an animal must record:

- The date of disposal
- The quantity of product involved
- How and where it was disposed of

Most veterinary practices will safely dispose of any unused or expired veterinary medicinal products upon request.

Record keeping for horses

Legislation defines the horse as a food-producing species. Therefore, keepers are required to maintain records for any purchase or acquisition of veterinary medicinal products for administration to horses.

Similarly, a record of administration must also be kept, just like any other food-producing animal. If a veterinary surgeon administers a veterinary medicine to a horse, this must be recorded, both in the horse passport (see 'Horse passports') and in a separate record.

Further information on horse medicines and record keeping requirements can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Records of products administered to a food-producing animal under the cascade

The 'cascade' provides a legal mechanism allowing veterinary surgeons to use their clinical judgement to prescribe a suitable medicine where no authorised medicine exists (more information on the cascade and prescribing unauthorised medicines is available on the GOV.UK website).

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons requires that consent be obtained from clients (in other words, the owners or keepers of the animals concerned) before prescribing veterinary medicines under the cascade.

A veterinary surgeon administering a veterinary medicinal product to food-producing animals under the cascade (or permitting another person to administer it under the vet's responsibility) must, as soon as is reasonably practicable, record the:

- Date they examined the animals
- Name and address of the owner
- Identification and number of animals treated
- Result of the veterinary surgeon's clinical assessment
- Trade name of the product, if there is one
- Manufacturer's batch number shown on the product, if there is one
- Name and quantity of the active substances
- Doses administered or supplied
- Duration of treatment
- Withdrawal period

The veterinary surgeon must keep the record for at least five years.

Specific powers for local authority officers

An officer of any local authority who has entered premises exercising any statutory power of entry for the purposes of enforcing any legislation relating to food hygiene, feed hygiene or animal health, may inspect any records made under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 relating to food-producing animals (in whatever form they are held), and may remove them to enable them to be copied.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: May 2026

Key legislation

- Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013
- Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013
- Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (England and Scotland) Regulations 2015

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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