



GAMEBIRD JOINT COMMUNICATION 2025

A number of key initiatives will be promoted through 2025 as the sector continues to push for reduced use of antibiotics in gamebirds.

The voluntary transition away from the use of in-feed antibiotics on rearing sites will continue and be more widely communicated throughout the sector.

A provisional standard calculation for national antibiotic use monitoring in reared birds has been developed and will be trialled and refined over the next two to three years to allow for more meaningful data monitoring and comparisons.

We will promote the Veterinary Medicines Directorate's (VMD) online and telephone-based reporting systems and encourage stakeholders to report suspected breach of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations (VMR). We will also call on the VMD and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) to take a more proactive role in enforcing the VMR for the gamebird sector.

Further initiatives, including a comprehensive communication strategy, will help the sector secure meaningful and sustainable reductions in its dependence on antibiotics.

2024 saw a small (5%) rise in overall antibiotic use, whereas the number of birds reared was very similar to 2023. Encouragingly there was a 25% fall in the use of in-feed medication compared with 2023, both in actual terms and as a percentage of total use.

Unfortunately, the game sector failed to meet its target for RUMA's Targets Taskforce (TTF) 2 <https://www.ruma.org.uk/targets-task-force-2/> for the end of 2024; by the end of 2025, a new target will be set for TTF 3.

In addition to the measures previously outlined, a number of other actions will be undertaken:

- The sector will continue to develop and encourage engagement with the veterinary-led training curriculum developed by members of the British Veterinary Poultry Association (BVPA) gamebird subcommittee in conjunction with gamekeepers and game farmers. The AIC Game Feed Committee (GFC), representing the major UK game feed compounders, released the Feed Adviser Register (FAR) Game Feed Module 2 last June and will soon release Module 3. The module was put together by the Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC) compounder members with support from BASC, BVPA, Game Farmers' Association (GFA), National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) and the gamebird veterinary community, and has been well received by the sector. This comprehensive course is aimed at game feed sales representatives and covers the fundamentals of game farm and shoot feed planning, and the nutritional link to animal health, welfare and productivity. As of March 2025, 78 people have enrolled in Module 1, 56 of whom have passed; with 52 and 36 people respectively for Module 2. The GFC is currently finalising Module 3, with an anticipated release date of July 2025.
- The GFA is planning to construct an online training portal in 2025 and is considering a range of educational courses that may be suitable to deliver in this way.
- The best-practice campaign to address the issue of residues of lasalocids (Avatec) in pheasants and partridges will be continued. There were no lasalocid residues found in game meat in the 2024/25 shooting season.
- The game sector will increase the promotion of self-regulation and auditing in the game-rearing sector. Trusted Game has a strong focus on welfare standards and antibiotic use, and this will continue to be widely promoted throughout the sector. Trusted Game is developing and implementing a benchmarking system for mortality and antibiotic use and plans to use site-to-site comparisons to help drive up standards. This will be fundamental to the sector's efforts to reduce antibiotic use by improving systems and health and welfare standards.



- Use of the GFA's Pen Scoring Matrix will continue to be encouraged to raise the standard of the release environment. Antibiotic use immediately post-release accounts for a disproportionately high percentage of total use.
- Most antibiotics used immediately post-release are used to treat hexamita, and there is an ongoing research project led by sector vets aiming to develop a better understanding of this parasite and how to treat associated conditions. A new part of this research is planned for this year and funding is being sought.
- The GFA will increase communication with participating vets and the AIC including feedback about use of Highest Priority – Critically Important Antibiotics (HP-CIAs), which is primarily the fluoroquinolone Enrofloxacin. Through these networks we will aim to increase the number of veterinary practices participating in the annual data collection and the campaign to reduce antibiotic use. The GFA will continue to amass data relating to the use of fluoroquinolone and focus on reducing their use. The GFA has produced a HP-CIA sign-off document for completion by vets when prescribing them. This document can be downloaded from the GFA website.
- The sector will produce communications material to promote the proper prescribing process to reduce the time lag between medicated feed being ordered and delivered. All vets will be encouraged to include a reference number for their PM report on in-feed antibiotic prescriptions.
- The value of *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* testing is increasingly recognised as important in the effort to manage mycoplasma infection (bulgy eye). A combination of testing and clinical assessment of the birds gives hope for controlling this difficult disease.



Although comparison with 2019 suggests that antibiotic use in the sector has been largely consistent with the number of birds reared, it is unfortunate that the reductions in use seen during TTF1 have not been maintained during TTF2.

In 2024, there was a 5% overall increase in antibiotic use in the game sector compared with 2023 and the total of 10.3 tonnes means that the sector failed to meet its TTF 2 target. The adverse weather throughout the rearing and releasing period was thought to be largely responsible for this increase. 2024 was the coolest summer since 2015 and 10 counties experienced their wettest September since on record (Met Office data).

There was a 25% fall in the use of in-feed antibiotics and a 31% rise in soluble use compared with 2023, although this still represents a reduction of 48% in overall use since 2016.

The use of HP-CIAs such as Enrofloxacin rose by 63%. This is still below 0.5% of overall use 2023 saw the lowest level as a percentage of total use since data collection began (0.44% in 2024 compared to 0.28% in 2023 and 0.58% in 2019).

- Emphasis will be placed on returning to the levels of HP-CIA use seen in 2022 and 2023 after the increase in 2024. Improved communication with the veterinary sector over the importance of HP-CIAs will be fundamental to this aspiration.

For the long-term success of the sector, it is critical that those involved in gamebird rearing follow the rules and guidelines.

- All antibiotics must be responsibly prescribed in line with the latest requirements by a UK-based vet who has the birds under their care, and ideally by a vet who is a member of the British Veterinary Poultry Association (BVPA).
- Although the use of HP-CIAs has reduced (by 30% since 2016), there must be renewed effort to only use these antibiotics as a last resort and with good reason, eg. where culture and sensitivity tests suggest it is the only suitable option.
- In-feed antibiotics may only be considered as an appropriate method of administration to treat birds following consultation, diagnosis and direction by the veterinary surgeon. If antibiotics are used as a preventative treatment (prophylactically or metaphylactically), there should be steps taken to prevent the need for use in future seasons, and those steps recorded.
- There follows the VMD/RCVS guidance document, *Reminder of best practice on prescribing and supply of antibiotics for gamebirds*.

Only together can we carve out the changes necessary to become sustainable for future generations.

The following veterinary practices support this document: Alnorthumbria Vets, Avivets, Chipping Norton Veterinary Hospital, Crowshall Veterinary Services, CW Farm Vets, Dalton's Game Consultancy Ltd, Farm Vet Solutions, Garth Pig Practice Ltd, Hafren Veterinary Group, Howells Veterinary Services Ltd, Larkmead Vets, Meadows Farm Vets, Norcal, Poultry Health Services, Sandhill Veterinary Services, Slate Hall Veterinary Practice, South Downs Veterinary Consultancy, St David's Game Bird Services and Wood Veterinary Group.



Reminder on best practice concerning the prescribing and supply of antibiotics for gamebirds

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) would like to explain the legislation that governs the prescribing and supply of antibiotics and would encourage anyone within the gamebird sector who has any concerns or suspicions of misconduct to report this as outlined.

The VMD enforces the Veterinary Medicines Regulations and takes the issue of illegal supply of medicines, such as the use of unauthorised antibiotics, and prescription misuse very seriously. Some examples of contraventions are:

Prescription misuse

Alteration of an existing prescription, including:

- Changing the date the prescription was signed
- Changing the quantity of the product
- Inclusion of additional medicines
- Altering the number of repeats

Prescription fraud, including:

- Submitting the same prescription to multiple retailers for supply where it is not a repeat prescription.
- Forging the signature of a vet, pharmacist or Suitably Qualified Person.

Illegal supply of medicines

Veterinary medicines which are advertised for the treatment or prevention of disease must be authorised by the VMD. Only authorised veterinary medicines can be legally sold or used in the UK, unless an unauthorised product was prescribed by a vet in accordance with the cascade.

The marketing, importation, sale, supply, administration and possession of a veterinary medicine not in line with the regulations is illegal.

In addition, the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013, as amended by the Veterinary Medicines (Amendment etc.) Regulations 2024 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/567/introduction/made>) in respect of Great Britain, now contain additional provisions on prescribing of antibiotics. These are that, subject to the professional obligations of a veterinary surgeon to ensure the health and welfare of animals under their care:

- A veterinary surgeon may not prescribe an antibiotic for routine use or to compensate for poor hygiene, inadequate animal husbandry, or poor farm management practices.
- Antibiotics can only be administered for preventative use in exceptional circumstances and, if this is to groups of animals, a veterinary surgeon must carry out a management review in order to identify factors and implement measures for the purpose of eliminating the need for any future such administration.

If you have any concerns that there has been a breach of the Regulations, then please share any information or intelligence through:

- The online reporting system; where it is possible to choose an anonymous option: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-illegal-animal-medicines>
- The telephone 'hotline' on 01932 338338.

The more information that is provided then the more likely the VMD can take action regarding the concern. However, the VMD will accept all reports even if you are not certain and don't have strong evidence, as it allows the intelligence unit to piece together an overall picture. The information and intelligence we receive is analysed and may be shared with our enforcement partners with the aim of protecting public health, animal health and the environment, and to promote animal welfare by assuring the safety, quality and efficacy of veterinary medicines.

All information will be treated confidentially and will be considered carefully in line with the VMD's enforcement policy at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/enforcement-policy-for-animal-medicines>.

Clinical assessment

A veterinary surgeon who prescribes a veterinary medicinal product classified as a POM-V, which includes all antibiotics, or a veterinary medicine under the cascade must first carry out a clinical assessment of the bird(s) and the bird(s) must be under that veterinary surgeon's care. A veterinary surgeon cannot usually have a bird under his or her care if there has been no physical examination.

The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct/Guidance at: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/under-care-new-guidance/> explains that:

A clinical assessment refers to any assessment which provides the veterinary surgeon with enough information to diagnose and prescribe safely and effectively.

When prescribing antibiotics for game, veterinary surgeons should:

- Ensure they have an in-depth knowledge of the premises, including its production systems, the environment, disease challenges and the general health status of the herd, flock or group.
- Have attended and inspected the premises and physically examined at least one representative animal prior to prescribing, or recently enough to ensure they have adequate current information and knowledge to prescribe responsibly and effectively, taking into account any available production data and diagnostic laboratory results. In order for a bird to be under the veterinary surgeon's care, the veterinary surgeon must have been given, and accepted, the responsibility for the health of the bird or flock by the owner of the owner's agent.
- A veterinary surgeon who has an animal under their care must be able, on a 24/7 basis, to physically examine the animal, or visit the premises (or make arrangements in advance for another veterinary service provider to do so on their behalf).
- Where an animal is under the care of more than one veterinary surgeon, those veterinary surgeons should keep each other informed of any relevant clinical information.
- Antibiotics should not be 'borrowed' or moved between farms or groups of birds on a farm as they are prescribed for a specific site, species and population.

If you are a veterinary surgeon and have any concerns about the conduct of veterinary professional in relation to the Code of Professional Conduct, then these can be reported to the RCVS via:

<https://www.rcvs.org.uk/concerns/im-a-vet-professional-and-i-want-to-raise-a-concern/>

If you are an animal owner, advice is available from the RCVS at: <https://animalowners.rcvs.org.uk/concerns/>

If you have any further questions you can contact:

- RCVS: advice@rcvs.org.uk
- VMD: postmaster@vmd.gov.uk ●