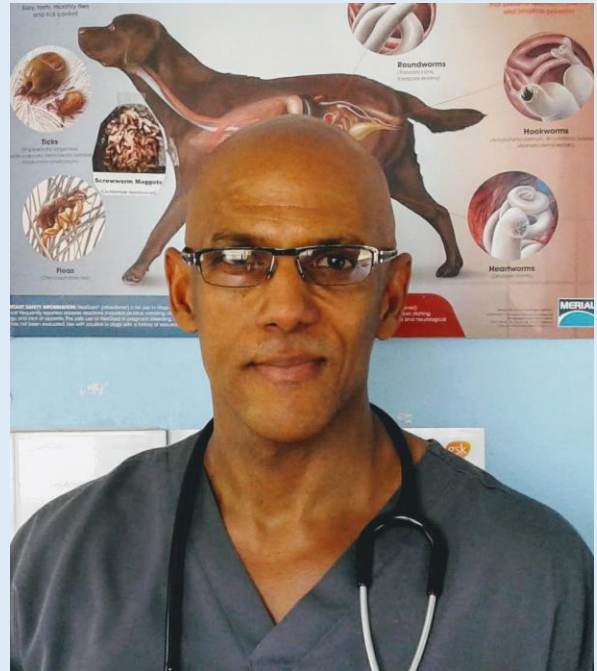


# Veterinary Drugs: Food Safety and Human Health Implications

Dr. Paul Cadogan

Veterinary drugs are those specifically manufactured and labelled for use in animals. The drugs themselves are NOT necessarily different from those used in human medicine – in fact most are used in both humans and animals.

As with drugs manufactured for human use, many veterinary preparations require prescriptions from a registered veterinarian if the latter does not supply the drug and, in keeping with the Food and Drug Act and the Pharmacy Act, must be dispensed by a registered pharmacist. This is to ensure that the drugs are utilized only when needed and with the proper guidance for safe and effective use.



Under the animal welfare guidelines of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), food-producing animals should be treated to alleviate illness or suffering, but in a manner that safeguards the health of people who may consume meat or milk derived from these animals. The FAO/WHO *Codex Alimentarius* (Food Code) sets out the levels of drug residues considered safe. Unsafe levels could prove harmful to human consumers, particularly if they have allergies to a particular drug.



As such, any veterinary drug used in food-producing animals must have a “withdrawal period” stated on the drug label, which is the time taken from the last treatment with the drug until the meat or milk is considered safe for human consumption. Whenever animals are treated, vets must inform the farmer of the withdrawal period, and the farmer must observe it. Drugs labelled “not for use” in any category of food-producing animal should NOT be used in that type of animal.

Another major area of concern is the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals. These drugs are necessary, but should only be used when needed, at the proper dosage and only for as long as needed to treat bacterial infections. Antibiotics that are critical in human medicine should be avoided as much as possible, and if used, should only be used under the direction of a vet. A list of such drugs has been developed by the WHO/OIE. This is part of the urgent fight against antibiotic resistant bacteria.



The Veterinary Services Division's Residue Laboratory carries out limited testing for drug and other residues in animal products. Detection of residues above safe levels will result in removal of the product from the food chain.



Veterinarians and farmers have a responsibility to protect consumers by using veterinary drugs properly, at the correct dosage, based on the weight of the animal and/or according to label directions.

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