Responsible use of antimicrobials in farm animals

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Prudent use of antimicrobials ensures that farmers, and their veterinary practitioners, will have continued access to these powerful drugs in the future. However, because of potential threats to human and animal health from antimicrobial resistance (AMR), the use of certain antimicrobials will have to be restricted.

Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria become resistant to antimicrobials, e.g., antibiotics. Resistance can spread between animals and humans so AMR is a problem for both animals and, more importantly, humans. So, farmers need to act now to preserve their access to these drugs in the future by spearheading the antimicrobial resistance campaign.

The risk of AMR is increased if antimicrobials are used inappropriately – used when there is no need to use them, for example when good hygiene, good stockmanship, and general disease management and good biosecurity are used.

The Codex of Good Practice developed by the industry is available on the DAFM website, www.agriculture.gov.ie.

GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are recommended to maintain acceptable levels of antimicrobial usage on beef and dairy farms:

1. Adhere to the correct dosage schedule regarding dose rate, number of doses and withdrawal period.
2. Use lab tests where possible to guide choice of the most appropriate antimicrobial.
3. Never use antimicrobials as a ‘blanket treatment’ of a group of animals.
4. Adapting these new guidelines may involve a change in the way you currently use antimicrobials. However, studies have shown that it is possible to significantly reduce the use of antimicrobials in farm animals and still maintain animal health and welfare.
5. Just because you have always treated sick animals in a certain way does not mean that you should continue to do so now that we are facing the real risks of AMR to both our animals and human health.

The five ‘ONLY’ rules

1. Only use antimicrobials when prescribed by a veterinarian.
2. Only use when needed, antimicrobials do not cure every infection.
3. Only use the dosage and follow length of treatment and withdrawal period as prescribed.
4. Only obtain antimicrobials from authorised sources.
5. Only use when associated with good animal husbandry, vaccination and hygiene practices.

We all have a role to play, and you, as antimicrobial users, can help.