



Sheep Veterinary Society

Division of the British Veterinary Association

Sheep Veterinary Society document written to advise vets on control of watery mouth in neonatal lambs in the face of limited supply of Spectam Scour Halt for the 2022 lambing season

We have been made aware that Spectam Scour Halt (Ceva Animal Health) is currently experiencing availability issues, and this is the only licensed oral antibiotic for the prevention of watery mouth in neonatal lambs.

There is increasingly a good awareness that it is inappropriate to use any prophylactic antibiotics and we know that many flocks have made significant progress in reducing their use of oral antibiotics in lambs through hygiene, provision of colostrum and good ewe nutrition. However, there were nearly 6 million doses of Spectam Scour Halt sold in GB last season and we are aware that there are still a number of vets who routinely prescribe antibiotics for neonatal lambs.

We have produced this guidance to make it clear what options are available to vets to prescribe in the event of an outbreak of watery mouth in this coming lambing season. We have consulted widely and considered alternatives based on formulation and route of administration, Antimicrobial Advice *ad hoc* Expert Group (AMEG) categorisation of antimicrobials and the cascade prescribing decision tree.

Spectam Scour Halt is an oral solution containing spectinomycin, a category D antimicrobial. This means that it is in the lowest risk category (in terms of the risk their use in animals could cause to public health). According to the guidance from the AMEG, antibiotics in the higher risk categorisation (category C) should be considered only when there are no antibiotics in category D that could be clinically effective.

Firstly, we would emphasise the importance of good ewe nutrition and correct body condition score, hygiene at lambing and in the lambing environment, and colostrum supply to newborn lambs to prevent watery mouth.

In deciding whether to prescribe, the first consideration should be whether a flock requires **any** antibiotics. Plenty of commercial flocks with good ewe nutrition, hygiene and colostrum management have shown that prophylactic antibiotics are not essential to commercial sheep farming.

In individual flocks, and with close veterinary supervision, it may be appropriate to use targeted control measures that may include antibiotic treatment, but in no flock is it appropriate for large numbers of lambs to be treated routinely from the start of a new lambing season.

Metaphylactic antibiotic treatment should be targeted only towards high-risk individuals, following a proactive flock health plan. This may include low birthweight lambs, triplets and using antibiotics only in the latter part of the lambing period.

Good management and planning with respect to ensuring appropriate colostrum supply is the key to reducing the risk of disease. Ahead of lambing time, ideally at mid pregnancy, ewe nutrition and disease control measures should be discussed between the farmer and veterinarian to give sufficient time to assess and implement new actions.

Where antibiotics are used then investigation of suspected treatment failure should be based on bacteriological culture and monitoring of the sensitivity of the pathogen to the antibiotic used on an individual farm.

There are no other antimicrobials licensed in sheep for prevention of watery mouth. In specific cases, where an unmet clinical need is identified, vets may treat animals under their care in accordance with the cascade as described here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-cascade-prescribing-unauthorised-medicines>

Watery mouth is considered to be a bacterial overgrowth and endotoxaemia in colostrum deprived lambs. In clinical cases, parenteral antibiotics may be more applicable than oral products. For metaphylaxis, oral formulations may be preferred, though the evidence for this is limited.

Parenteral (injectable) antibiotics that are category D include oxytetracycline, benzyl penicillin, ampicillin and amoxicillin. Data from published literature suggests that amoxicillin may be an appropriate choice. From the surveillance results in the UK Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance and Sales Surveillance (VARSS) report, resistance in E coli isolates from neonatal lambs to tetracyclines appears to be higher than other antimicrobial classes tested, although it should be noted that this only represents samples sent to government laboratories, so may not be representative.

There are no alternative oral liquid formulations containing only a category D antimicrobial active that are licensed for sheep in the UK. However, there are oral powders containing category D antimicrobials (including amoxicillin and trimethoprim-sulphonamides) which may be considered under the cascade, as long as the vet is confident that the farmer will be able to mix the powder correctly into liquid form and administer correctly to lambs. This extends to consideration of the shelf life of product once mixed and appropriate disposal of unused liquid (which under no circumstances should be poured down the drain).

Oral solutions / suspensions that may be considered include products containing sulfadiazine (category D) and the aminoglycoside neomycin (category C), licensed in pre-ruminant calves for treatment of diarrhoea, and products containing the aminoglycoside paromomycin (category C), licensed in pre-ruminant calves and in pigs for the treatment of gastrointestinal infections caused by E coli and in sheep, goats and cattle for the treatment of Cryptosporidium.

There is an oral preparation containing spectinomycin (category D) licensed for young piglets in the United States. In exceptional instances where a vet considers that there is not a clinically suitable authorised veterinary medicine available, then he/she can apply to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) for a Special Import Certificate to permit the importation of an alternative medicine authorised in another country. In these cases, the vet must ensure that the evidence base for the prescribing decision is robust, giving due consideration to medicines available higher up the cascade order (in this case including authorised products licensed for sheep for a different condition and those licensed for a different species). Further guidance on the responsible use of antibiotics under the cascade can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/responsible-antibiotic-use-under-the-prescribing-cascade>.

Although in the past the prescribing of antibiotic tablets or capsules licensed in companion animals was widespread, this practice is not acceptable as it is not clear that all the excipients of these products have Maximum Residue Limits (MRL) or are on the GB MRL list.

We are aware that some vets are using E. coli vaccines and bovine concentrated lactoserum in sheep flocks. While we commend this approach to preventative flock health, we are not aware of efficacy studies for these products in terms of preventing watery mouth in lambs.

Similarly, we appreciate that probiotics are given to newborn lambs in some flocks. Again this may be preferable to using antibiotics though there is no clear evidence of their value as prophylaxis for watery mouth in flocks from clinical trials, only anecdotal reports with mixed results.

Due to the legalities associated with advertising veterinary medicines, tradenames of alternative products have not been included though the Veterinary Medicines Directorate Product Information Database contains information about veterinary medicines authorised in GB and N. Ireland

<https://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/productinformationdatabase/search>

References:

The cascade: prescribing unauthorised medicines <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-cascade-prescribing-unauthorised-medicines>

Categorisation of antibiotics in the European Union. 12December 2019
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UK Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance and Sales Surveillance Report UK-VARSS 2020
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