

Antibiotics—your role as a pet owner



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Antibiotic resistance in pets is becoming a greater challenge, much like it is in humans. Antibiotic resistance is when the bacteria causing an infection are not affected by the antibiotic, making it ineffective as treatment.

Antibiotics are not always the answer

Not every infectious disease needs antibiotic treatment (for example, viral infections). Don't demand antibiotics if your vet says that your pet does not need them.

Antibiotics are lifesaving drugs

Antibiotics are vital to treat and prevent disease in animals and humans. But the risk that the organism causing the disease will develop resistance to them increases every time they are used. To make sure antibiotics stay effective now and in the future, they must be strictly controlled and used only when really necessary and with caution.

Keep your animal healthy

A healthy animal is better equipped to fight off infections. Do your best to keep your pet healthy by feeding it food with a high nutritional value, providing a healthy lifestyle, having it vaccinated regularly and taking it to your vet for an examination each year. If your pet gets sick, go to your vet immediately.

Do not try to treat your pet yourself

Do not share antibiotics between pets or re-use tablets that were prescribed for an earlier illness. They may not be appropriate for your pet's current condition, or they may be toxic for certain animals, out of date or contaminated. Never give human medicines to your pet as they could be dangerous and ineffective.

Diagnostic tests might be needed

Your vet may need to carry out a laboratory test to find out whether treatment with antibiotics is really necessary and, if so, which antibiotic will work best. Your vet will then be able to prescribe the right antibiotic for the right bacteria. Older antibiotics, such as penicillin, are often as effective as modern antibiotics.

Follow the dosage instructions

Make sure that you give your pet all the recommended doses of an antibiotic as prescribed by your vet, even if your pet seems better after a few doses. This helps cure the current infection and will also help to keep the bacteria from discovering new ways of being resistant to the antibiotic.

Top tip

People's hands are the most common way of spreading germs. Although these germs can be harmless they may also cause diseases such as stomach bugs and bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics such as MRSA and MRSP between animals and people. Make sure you wash your hands properly.

Talk to your vet

If you have worries or questions about antibiotic resistance, you should discuss these with your vet. Your vet is an expert and will be your best advisor. Try to build up a good relationship with your vet so you can work together to keep your pet healthy and happy.

Glossary

Antibiotics: drugs that kill disease-causing agents such as bacteria. They are not effective against viruses.

MRSA: meticillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. These highly resistant bacteria are typically found in human hospitals but can also cause infection in animals.

MRSP: meticillin-resistant staphylococcus pseudintermedius. These highly resistant bacteria typically cause infections in animals but, on rare occasions, have caused human infection.

About the BVA

The BVA is the national representative body for the UK veterinary profession. We support our members to fulfil their roles for the benefit of animals and the public.

This is one of a series of leaflets for animal owners produced by the BVA, you can find more at www.bva.co.uk/public