An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

FAQs in relation to Dry Cow Therapy

Veterinary Practitioner section

Can I prescribe Dry Cow Therapy at drying off this autumn?

Yes, provided you adopt a selective approach to Dry Cow Therapy (DCT).

What is a selective approach to DCT?

A selective approach to DCT is holistic in the responsible use of antimicrobials. It endeavors to reduce the use of antimicrobials by identifying as many suitable cows as possible to receive an internal teat sealant only and no antimicrobial treatment at drying off. An assessment of the risk factors associated with the farm, the risk of infection of the individual cows and in some cases the individual quarter will allow for the remainder of the cows to receiving both an antimicrobial treatment and an internal teat sealant.

What do I need to know about a blanket approach to DCT?

It is not legally permissible and must be avoided. A blanket approach to DCT is the administration of antibiotics to all animals based on herd-level risk factors alone, irrespective of the health status of an individual animal or related risk factors. This use of antibiotics in a blanket approach to DCT is systematic and is not legally permissible. The new legislation requires that you adopt a selective approach when prescribing for the dry period.

Is prophylaxis permitted as part of selective approach to Dry Cow Therapy?

A veterinary practitioner must be able to provide justification for prophylactic prescribing of dry cow antibiotics. Prophylaxis is legally permissible in a selective approach to DCT. In contrast prophylaxis is not legally permissible in a blanket approach to DCT.

Further Guidance

1. Animal Health Ireland issued guidelines for Veterinary practitioners on prudent prescribing of dry cow and in lactation antibiotics: https://animalhealthireland.ie/assets/uploads/2022/01/CellCheck-Prudent-Prescribing-2022-FINAL.pdf?dl=1
2. Guidance is available from the Veterinary Council of Ireland Code of Professional Conduct: https://www.vci.ie/Publications/Code-of-Professional-Conduct
3. The European Medicines Agency: https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/categorisation-antibiotics-used-animals-promotes-responsible-use-protect-public-animal-health
4. DAFM: https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/45f45-antimicrobial-resistance-amr/#information-for-veterinary-professionals

Farmer section

Does the new veterinary medicines legislation allow my veterinary practitioner to prescribe antibiotics at drying off?

Yes. Your veterinary practitioner must use a selective approach to DCT in order to prescribe antibiotics at drying off. Your vet cannot use a blanket approach to DCT to prescribe antibiotics for your cows at drying off.

What is the difference between blanket and selective approach to Dry Cow Therapy?

A selective dry-cow strategy involves administering internal teat sealant only to a selected proportion of suitable cows at drying off, with the remainder of the cows receiving both an antibiotic tube and an internal teat sealant. Blanket dry cow therapy is systematic with every quarter of every cow receiving an antibiotic tube, based on a herd level assessment only, therefore some antibiotic treatments may be given to animals that do not need them. A selective dry-cow strategy is not without risk, hence the importance of engaging with your veterinary practitioner when making farm-level decisions.

What will my veterinary practitioner need to prescribe dry cow antibiotics for my herd?

Your veterinary practitioner needs to assess the risk of infection to the individual cows in your herd to prescribe dry cow therapy. Your vet may need to examine individual cows and maybe individual quarters. It would be important that you would provide your vet with records of all mastitis events, treatments administered, and related outcomes along with and any milk quality data including somatic cell counts, microbiological testing and antibiotic susceptibility testing.

Further Guidance

A Code of Good Practice regarding the Responsible Use of Antimicrobials on Dairy Farms has been developed by farming and veterinary stakeholders of the INAP Animal Health Committee and is available here:

https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/45f45-antimicrobial-resistance-amr/#information-for-livestock-professionals

Animal Health Ireland:

https://animalhealthireland.ie/programmes/cellcheck/