

What is the “cascade” and what does it mean to use drugs “off licence”

The Cascade is a risk-based decision-tree to help vets decide which product to use when there is no authorised veterinary medicine available. Without the Cascade, veterinary surgeons would only be allowed to prescribe veterinary medicines that are authorised for a given species and for a given condition.

The Cascade is based on the principle that, if there is no veterinary medicine authorised in the UK for treating a disease in a particular species, a product may be used which is licenced in the UK for: -

- the same condition in another animal species
- another condition in the same animal species.

A common example of this would be using metacam in sheep as there is currently no licensed pain relief for sheep. This is referred to as using the drug “off licence”.

If cascade drugs are used the MINIMUM statutory withdrawal period shown below should be applied of: -

For milk -

- (i) the longest withdrawal period in the summary of product characteristics for any species multiplied by a factor of 1.5.
- (ii) 7 days, if the veterinary medicinal product is not authorised for animals producing milk for human consumption; or
- (iii) 1 day, if the medicinal product has a zero-hour withdrawal period

For meat –

- (i) the longest withdrawal period provided in its summary of product characteristics for meat and offal, multiplied by a factor of 1.5;
- (ii) 28 days if the veterinary medicinal product is not authorised for food-producing animals; or
- (iii) 1 day, if the veterinary medicinal product has a zero-day withdrawal period;

This is because the withdrawal period has not been determined for the way in which the drug was used.

This is ALSO the case if a drug is used for the correct species and correct disease BUT in a way that differs from that stated on the data sheet, for instance, if you used lactating cow tubes for mastitis more frequently or gave a longer course of injectable antibiotics.

When off licence products are used by vets or prescribed for use, they will let you know that the product or way in which the product is intended for use is off licence, so the relevant withdrawal periods can be used and noted in all medicine records.