

## **Access to Animal Medications: Plan Ahead for Changes Coming this Summer**

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Changes are coming to the way certain antibiotics will be available to animal owners by June 11, 2023. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has been taking steps to improve the judicious use of antibiotics in humans and animals. For animal owners, the next step is outlined in *Guidance for Industry (GFI) #263*. This document requires drug companies to change the labels on over-the-counter medically important antibiotics (MIA) to prescription status. The FDA has been working toward the goal of having all medically important antibiotics for animals fall under the oversight of veterinarians. In 2017, FDA required MIAs in feed to have a veterinary feed directive (VFD) and all antibiotics administered via water have prescription labels.

Not all drugs and not even all antibiotics will be affected by this rule change—only MIAs. Medically important antibiotics are those classes of antibiotics that are important for treating human disease. However, the most common over-the-counter antibiotics such as penicillin, tetracyclines, and sulfas fall in the medically important category and will no longer be available without a prescription. GFI #263 affects MIAs for livestock, equine, and small animals. Dewormers, some coccidiostats, and some less common and non-MIA antibiotics will not have a label change.

Antibiotics you have on-hand after they are no longer available to buy without a prescription may be used legally. However, stocking up on these products is not recommended they may expire before they can be used. The best idea is to work with your veterinarian and have a plan in place for when animals may need antibiotics. If you don't currently have a regular veterinarian, now is a good time to reach out to one *before* an emergency occurs. Veterinarians are not obligated to write prescriptions or see animals, particularly after hours, if they are not regular clients. A valid veterinary client patient relationship (VCPR) is required for veterinarians to write prescriptions. To establish a valid VCPR, be prepared to have an annual visit from the veterinarian in order to have access to emergency visits and prescriptions. This federal rule change does not mean a veterinarian needs to see every animal every time it is sick. However, how you and your veterinarian will handle sick animals, prescriptions, and emergency situations is a conversation that should be completed in advance.