

ANTIBIOTIC RESIDUES IN MILK – notes for guidance

REGULATIONS (EC) NOS. 852/2004 AND 853/2004 (AS AMENDED)

The Northern Ireland dairy industry has a well-proven record of quality milk production, which is widely recognised by consumers. It is in the interests of producers to protect this image by producing safe, high quality milk to ensure consumers and traders can continue to have confidence in Northern Ireland dairy products.

The Food Hygiene Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and EC Regulations No. 852/2004 on the Hygiene of Foodstuffs and No. 853/2004, laying down specific hygiene rules for Food of Animal Origin, provide the legislative basis for the safe production of milk which is free from antibiotic residues.

Why Prevent Antibiotic Contamination?

◆ **To protect consumers' health**

Antibiotics entering the food chain may lead to allergic reactions in humans and antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria.

◆ **To safeguard the wholesome image of Northern Ireland milk**

It is essential that the dairy industry as a whole produces high quality milk which is free from antibiotic residues.

◆ **To avoid heavy penalties for producers**

Disposal of contaminated milk incurs financial losses which may be passed back to the producer.

◆ **To prevent losses to processors**

Production of cultured dairy products can be adversely affected by traces of antibiotics, resulting in sub-standard product. Specifications for valuable home and export markets require dairy products to be free from antibiotics.

◆ **To comply with current legislation**

You are legally required to comply with the EC Regulations No. 852/2004 and No. 853/2004 to ensure that milk containing antibiotics is not placed on the market.

Contamination of milk is an offence liable to prosecution. It is therefore important that all milk producers are able to demonstrate they have taken all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of milk being sold by them.

How to prevent antibiotic contamination?

- ◆ **All cows should be given an identity**
Use freeze branding, large ear tags or similar.
- ◆ **Clearly mark all treated cows**
Treated cows should be identified using a dye, coloured tape or ankle band. Details should be displayed in the milking area. Input details of treatments to automatic ID systems. Properly segregate cows treated with Dry Cow Therapy. Ensure relief milkers are fully informed regarding all treated cows.
- ◆ **Keep a record of all treated cows**
Records should identify the cow treated, the date of treatment, the product used and the withdrawal period. This is now the law.
- ◆ **Withhold milk from treated cows for the recommended time**
Read and follow instructions carefully and note the withdrawal period. Obtain direction from your veterinary surgeon, regarding the withholding period, if the milking cow is injected with drugs or antibiotics.
- ◆ **Administer only veterinary medicines authorised for use on dairy cows**
Only medicines authorised for use on dairy animals must be administered to them e.g. any veterinary medicine containing **florfenicol** is not authorised for use in dairy animals.
- ◆ **Withhold and test milk from recently calved or purchased cows and heifers**
Be aware of cows calving early after dry cow therapy and cows which hold antibiotics in their system longer than usual.
- ◆ **Milk treated cows last or rinse equipment with warm water**
Research has shown that cold water rinsing of milking jars and lines may not remove all antibiotics from the surfaces as many antibiotics are oil based.
- ◆ **Ensure no leakage into the milk transfer system through equipment outlet valves**
Many milking systems have dump buckets/lines to isolate contaminated milk, preventing accidental transfer.
- ◆ **Inform buyer if contaminated milk enters bulk tank**
If possible a sample of milk should be tested before collection using an on-farm testing kit. If a test for antibiotics cannot be completed, the buyer should be informed before the milk is collected.
Any milk contaminated with antibiotics should be disposed of in an appropriate manner. It is not good practice to feed antibiotic contaminated milk to young calves.
- ◆ **Contaminated Feed**
Be aware that if lactating cows ingest mould-contaminated feedstuffs their milk may cause a failure to an antibiotic test.

Quality Milk for Everyone

Where drugs are used on the dairy herd, there is always a risk of antibiotic contamination of milk. Therefore the utmost care should be taken during the milking routine to minimise the risk of antibiotics entering the food chain.

Consider attending appropriate training courses on responsible use of veterinary medicines.

Milk of the highest quality is necessary to meet present and future market requirements and consumers now demand milk products of the highest quality and safety.

Check that you have appropriate farm insurance cover as disposing of your own bulk tank or tanker of milk, contaminated with antibiotics, will be costly.

For further information on preventing antibiotic contamination of milk contact your Veterinary Practitioner.

For advice on the legislation mentioned, milk producers should contact their own legal adviser.

Note: This leaflet gives general guidance only and should not be treated as a complete and authoritative statement of the law.

For further information contact your local DAERA Milk Inspector:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/complying-hygiene-regulations-dairy-farms

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