

New Antibiotic Regulations: What Ontario Beekeepers Need to Know

New antibiotic regulations came into effect on December 1, 2018. One key effect of this legislation is that veterinarians must now prescribe all antibiotics used in livestock that are considered important to human medicine. In beekeeping, we use antibiotics to prevent the development of American foulbrood (AFB)¹. Once infected, the only “treatment” is to burn the colonies and equipment, bees included. Antibiotic use remains an important part of a multifaceted AFB prevention strategy². A summary of the four basic steps required for accessing antibiotics for AFB prevention by beekeepers in Ontario under this new legislation are:

Step One: Inform yourself about AFB, as well as established Integrated Pest Management Practices and Best Management Practices for Ontario beekeepers.

Proper use of antibiotics is important for beekeepers in Ontario. It is also important to recognize that there are methods – either on the internet or even from other jurisdictions - that do not align with Ontario recommendations (due to being less effective, increased risk of prolonging an infection, development of resistance, or contamination). Prior to meeting with your veterinarian, inform yourself on Ontario specific treatment recommendations, as well as AFB prevention and management. This information can be found using these links:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/bees/afb-mgmt.htm>

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/bees/2017-treatment.htm>

Step Two: Locate a veterinarian that is willing to work with beekeepers.

The College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) has an online search tool for locating veterinarians, found here: <https://onlineservice.cvo.org/webs/cvo/register/#/>. On this page, click “Show More Options”, and select “Bees” from the species drop-down menu.

Additionally, the OBA’s Tech Transfer Program (TTP) has conducted four veterinary training workshops across the province as of March 2019. These workshops are being done to educate veterinarians interested in working with beekeepers, and they specifically addressed how beekeepers may use antibiotics to prevent AFB infections. A list of veterinarians who have taken this workshop will be posted on the OBA website soon.

Some beekeeping supply companies may have veterinarians in-store by appointment or on predetermined dates. Contact your local supplier to see if they have this available. Another potential avenue to access a veterinarian may be through your Local Beekeepers’ Association (LBA). Some LBAs are planning to invite veterinarians with mobile licenses to work with beekeepers at their meetings. To find an LBA, visit: <https://www.ontariobee.com/community/local-beekeepers-associations>

Step Three: Develop a VCPR with your veterinarian.

In order to obtain a prescription from a veterinarian, you must first develop a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR³). Since the beekeeping industry in Ontario has obtained an exception for a site visit requirement (i.e. the veterinarian does not have to come to examine your

hives), veterinarians may choose to establish the VCPR over the phone. We have designed a simple two-page Guide specifically for beekeepers. This Guide is to inform you about what basic information you will need to have ready for consultation with a veterinarian. **The VCPR Development Guide for Beekeepers in Ontario provides additional information, find it here:**

<https://www.ontariobee.com/outreach/ttp/antibiotic-access-resources-for-beekeepers>.

Step Four: Once prescribed by your veterinarian, obtain antibiotics for prevention of AFB.

Once a veterinarian has written a prescription, they will be able to inform you on how the medication can be dispensed to you. Dispensing refers to the act of the veterinarian giving you the medication and describing its proper use. Veterinarians often dispense out of a veterinary clinic or other accredited facility. In order to dispense antibiotics outside of a clinic, veterinarians must have a special mobile license. However, some veterinarians may be able to mail antibiotics directly to the client. This may be especially important for remote communities. You will be able to discuss with your veterinarian what dispensing options are available to you.

Antibiotics are an important part of American foulbrood (AFB) prevention. AFB is a very serious disease that can have a direct economic impact on a beekeeping operation. Establishment of AFB within a honeybee population can threaten the sustainability of the industry. Antibiotics must be part of a strategy that also includes biosecurity practices, education, and operating with inspection and regulatory requirements established for Ontario².

When we first heard of these regulatory changes, the Ontario Beekeepers' Association (OBA) formed the Antibiotic Access Working Group, which is composed of nearly a dozen industry experts, specialists including members of OBA's Tech Transfer Program (TTP), and veterinarians. The Working Group has collaborated successfully with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO), the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA), and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to ensure reasonable access continues under these new regulations⁴.

¹ Fumagillin, the antibiotic that is used to treat Nosema infections. is not categorized as important to human medicine, and therefore does not fall under this new legislation.

² For more information on AFB prevention and management, as well as what to do when you have a suspected case, visit: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/bees/afb-mgmt.htm>

³ The Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) describes the professional working relationship between a veterinarian, a client, and the patient. This must be established before a veterinarian can extend professional services to a client, except in emergency circumstances. In order to establish the VCPR with a beekeeper the veterinarian must:

- confirm the provincial registration of the beekeeper
- confirm the number of colonies held by the beekeeper
- confirm the production management practices of the beekeeper
- confirm the standard operating procedure / protocol for use in a disease requiring an antimicrobial drug

Requesting additional information is at the discretion of the veterinarian.

⁴ For more on the background behind this legislation and the outcomes that the Antibiotic Access Working Group has accomplished on this issue, visit:

https://www.ontariobee.com/sites/ontariobee.com/files/document/OBA_Antibiotic_Progress_Bulletin_November_2018.pdf