



ANTIBIOTIC ACCESS WORKING GROUP BULLETIN – NOVEMBER 2018

Attention: Ontario Beekeepers

New antibiotic regulations will come into effect on Saturday, December 1, 2018 that will affect Ontario (and Canadian) beekeepers and their access to antibiotics used to control American foulbrood.

This legislation is the result of a World Health Organization (WHO) decision to reduce the use of antibiotics worldwide. The main goal of this legislation is to prevent or slow the development of antibiotic resistance in diseases that affect human health. One key effect of this legislation is that all antibiotics used in livestock – which includes bees – must be prescribed by veterinarians. In beekeeping, we use antibiotics to prevent the development of the devastating American foulbrood (AFB). Once infected, the only “treatment” is to burn the colonies and equipment, bees included.

When the beekeeping industry first heard of the upcoming changes to antibiotic regulations nearly two years ago, the OBA took action. We formed an Antibiotic Access Working Group, which was composed of nearly a dozen industry experts, specialists, and veterinarians. We were able to meet frequently with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) and the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) to discuss the concerns of our industry. Early on, four key issues were established.

1 – Rationale for Responsible Use

A document was developed to illustrate that the prophylactic use of antibiotics in the prevention of AFB in the beekeeping industry is responsible. This document covered the history of AFB in Ontario, the importance of access to preventive antibiotics, the minimal risk to human health as a result of this application, the oversight of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) as it relates to antibiotic application, and the potential impact of AFB infection to the various sectors of the honey bee industry.

2 – Vet Client Patient Relationship (VCPR)

For veterinarians to legally administer services to clients, they must first establish a Vet-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR).

The VCPR describes a list of criteria that must be met before a veterinarian can provide any services. These guidelines are set out in the *Veterinarians Act*, with oversight by the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO).

The list of criteria was quite extensive, and of particular concern included “evidence of in person consultation either by actual visits to production sites or consultation by real time video.” The ability to visit large-scale commercial operations, some of which consist of hundreds of bee yards, is not only impractical but would also add unnecessary expense to beekeepers. Additionally, antibiotics are used prophylactically; once AFB is symptomatic, OMAFRA’s Apiary Program steps in to burn those colonies. Thus, there is no disease for the veterinarian to visually inspect. Thirdly, in order for veterinarians to treat or examine animals outside of a licensed facility, they must have a special “mobile” license. This would provide yet another barrier to beekeepers’ ability to access veterinarians.

Due to these issues raised by our Working Group, the CVO worked on our behalf to grant an exemption for the beekeeping industry in Ontario to several of the criteria required by the VCPR. The current proposed VCPR requirements for veterinarians servicing beekeepers are to:

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

It cannot be emphasized enough that these changes to the VCPR have been a major success of the Working Group, and the support of the CVO has been instrumental to that success. It is also worth noting that the VCPR can be established over the phone by virtue of telemedicine.

The “management practices of the beekeeper” is as simple as letting the veterinarian know whether you are a honey producer, a queen / nuc producer, or offer pollination services (or some combination of the three). The Working Group is currently moving ahead to develop templates for beekeepers to assist in the establishment of the VCPR.

As we in the industry are well aware, the “number of colonies held by the beekeeper” can fluctuate greatly over the course of the year. Veterinarians will be aware of this, and it will not hinder the ability to access an appropriate amount of antibiotics. Part of the training for vets that we are developing (key issue 4) will cover this. It is not uncommon in other livestock groups that the managed populations vary over time.

As far as cost is concerned, veterinarians will be able to decide what they will charge to provide services. These fees commonly include consultation and dispensing fees. However, given that the VCPR can be established over the phone, and that there are opportunities for cost sharing by having “bee days” (see key issue 3), the cost to beekeepers may be minimal.

3 – Dispensing

In the past, beekeepers have been able to purchase antibiotics for use in livestock from co-ops, feed mills, beekeeping supply stores, etc. As of December 1st, Livestock Medicine Outlets (LMOs) will no longer be able to sell antibiotics without a veterinarian. In order for veterinarians to dispense antibiotics, they must do so in a “brick and mortar” location, i.e. a veterinary clinic or other accredited facility. In order to dispense antibiotics outside of a clinic, vets must have a special mobile license.

However, veterinarians are also able to dispense antibiotics through “Veterinary Purchasing,” through which they can have antibiotics mailed directly to the client. This is the most likely avenue through which beekeepers will access antibiotics. This could mean the interaction can be as simple as a phone call to a veterinarian to establish the VCPR, after which the antibiotic arrives in the mail.

There are other creative avenues that are being explored for dispensing options. There is at least one beekeeping supply store that has confirmed a vet will be present on certain days to prescribe / dispense antibiotics. The Working Group is also looking into the possibility of veterinarians hosting “bee days” to service many beekeepers in one day. Veterinarians with mobile licenses may even be able to host “bee days” at Local Beekeepers’ Association meetings. This could allow for some reduction in consultation fees, to be determined by the veterinarian.

4 – Education for Veterinary and Beekeeping Industry

One key task remaining for the Working Group is to develop and implement training for both veterinarians and beekeepers. The CVO and OVMA have asked the beekeeping industry to develop this training material. The Working Group has already created outlines for this material and discussed how best to implement it.

OBA's Tech-Transfer Program (TTP) will put on separate workshops for veterinarians and beekeepers. The training for veterinarians will likely be full day courses, administered on a cost recovery basis. The training will be focused on antibiotic use and AFB, and not liability for other honey bee pathogens. We are a long way away from "bee vets," which would require much more extensive training, and integration into the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) course material.

Training for beekeepers will likely be half-day workshops, and the hope is to be able to offer these courses for free, pending availability of funds. This training will include AFB management, as well as VCPR development. VCPR templates will also be developed and distributed to beekeepers to ease this transition as much as possible.

The Ontario Beekeepers' Association will continue to update Ontario beekeepers as progress is made on these issues, including when workshops and training material become available.

View the presentation [The Clock is Ticking: Ontario's New Antimicrobial Requirements](#), made at the OBA AGM & Conference last week.

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