

Even under the watchful eye of the most experienced livestock caregivers, by the time an animal shows noticeable signs of illness, injury from the disease has already occurred. As technology may improve our ability to detect and diagnose bacterial infections in animals, the need to have the appropriate drug available to treat, control, or, in limited circumstances, prevent disease in an animal will always be a priority ([Food and Agriculture Code \[FAC\] § 14402](#)). The best chance for a good outcome is to provide the proper course of treatment as soon as possible. It is essential for remotely located livestock producers to know who they can call for veterinary care and what options are available to obtain the appropriate drug(s) necessary to treat, control, and prevent disease in a timely manner.

Effective January 1, 2018, a prescription from a California-licensed veterinarian (within a valid veterinarian-client- patient relationship [VCPR]) was required for the use of all medically important antibiotics in California livestock ([FAC § 14400-14408](#)). Federal law, through [Guidance for Industry #263](#), similarly brought the rest of the nation's medically important antibiotic drugs under veterinary control in June 2023.

Veterinary Prescriptions

- If a veterinarian decides that the appropriate use of a medically important antibiotic is necessary to treat, control, or, in some cases, prevent disease, before dispensing the drug, the veterinarian must offer the client a written prescription that the client or with their veterinarian ([9 BPC §4170](#)).
- Veterinarians must notify the client in writing that they have a choice to obtain either the medication or a written prescription, and that they shall not be charged for the written prescription ([16 CCR § 2032.2\(c\)](#)). This may be posted in their place of business.
- Veterinarians, by law, cannot dispense or prescribe a drug for a period of time inconsistent with the medical condition of the animal or group of animals for which the VCPR is established, or the type of drug prescribed. In addition, the drug cannot be prescribed for longer than one year from the date the veterinarian examined the animal(s) without examining the animal again ([16 CCR § 2032.1\(c\)](#)). A veterinarian may not prescribe for longer than 6 months when VCPR was established through telehealth** ([11 BPC §4826.6 \(i\)\(4\)](#)).
 - **Antibiotic prescriptions issued through the establishment of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship by telehealth** cannot be authorized for a period longer than 14 days of treatment.** No additional antibiotic drug prescription, including refills, can be issued unless the veterinarian has conducted an in-person examination of the animal patient. VFDs may not be issued with a telehealth** appointment only, pursuant to federal law. ([11 BPC § 4826.6 \(i\)\(2\)](#)).



» *Current versions of our outreach documents are available online.*

***Throughout this document, the term telehealth or telemedicine is used as it may be more familiar to readers. In order to be compliant with California code, synchronous audio-video communication is required for establishing a telehealth VCPR.*

Current Options for Filling Prescriptions

- **Veterinary Food-Animal Drug Retailer (VFADRs).** VFADRs are licensed by the California Board of Pharmacy and can fill prescriptions for pick-up or delivery. Your veterinarian may suggest a VFADR, or you can search for VFADRs at https://www.pharmacy.ca.gov/about/verify_lic, (under Facility License, select Veterinary Food-Animal Drug Retailer). For a complete list, click “Search” without typing any search criteria. Use the license information to contact retailers and ask how they are accepting prescriptions and your options for purchasing antibiotics.
- **Licensed Pharmacies.** Not all pharmacies carry livestock drugs; confirm in advance of placing an order. Search for your local licensed pharmacy at https://www.pharmacy.ca.gov/about/verify_lic, (under Facility License, select Pharmacies).
- **Licensed Online Pharmacies.** Several veterinary licensed online pharmacies are registered with the California Board of Pharmacy to fill prescriptions in the state. Buying from legitimate sources ensures the quality meets FDA standards and your payment details are secured from fraudulent websites. Find a verified licensed online pharmacy at <https://www.safe.pharmacy/buying-safely/#USvets>.
- **Veterinarians.** Veterinarians may dispense medically important antibiotics to their patients within a valid VCPR, but they cannot fill prescriptions from veterinarians outside of their practice (9 BPC § 4170), except under limited circumstances (16 CCR § 2032.25). Your veterinarian may also suggest other options for filling a prescription in your area.

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)

- It is the veterinarian’s responsibility to establish a VCPR before practicing veterinary medicine, unless the patient is a wild animal or the owner is unknown (16 CCR § 2032.1).
- The criteria that must be met in order to establish a valid VCPR in California includes (16 CCR § 2032.1):
 - The client has authorized the veterinarian to assume responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the animal, including the need for medical treatment.
 - The veterinarian has assumed responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the animal and has communicated with the client a course of treatment appropriate to the circumstance.
 - The veterinarian is personally acquainted with the care of the animal(s) by virtue of either (11 BPC § 4826.6):
 - examining the animal patient in person,
 - examining the animal patient through telehealth**,
 - by making medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animals are kept.
 - The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the animal(s).
- Effective January 1, 2024, telehealth**, via synchronous audio-video communication, is permissible for establishing a new VCPR in - California (11 BPC § 4826.6 (i)(5)).

Please note: The "Livestock: Use of Antimicrobial Drugs" law does not change where medicated feed can be purchased. The Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) is an existing federal requirement that went into effect January 1, 2017 (21 CFR Part 558).

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