

Guidance on the use of formaldehyde in aquaculture

Formaldehyde¹, which is classified as a Category 1B carcinogen², is used as both a biocide and a medicine in aquaculture. This note is intended as guidance to veterinary surgeons considering formaldehyde for the treatment of fish under their care.

Use as a veterinary medicine

The use of formaldehyde to treat or prevent fish diseases, such as freshwater ectoparasitism, falls within the scope of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations. As there are no authorised medicinal products containing formaldehyde in the UK, veterinary surgeons can only prescribe using the Cascade.

Veterinary surgeons prescribing formaldehyde-containing products should be familiar with VMD guidance on the Cascade (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-cascade-prescribing-unauthorised-medicines>) and be aware that the effectiveness and toxicity of the product is likely to vary between fish species and with environmental conditions.

Under the Cascade, fish may be prescribed an authorised veterinary medicine from outside of the UK. This requires a Special Import Certificate from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. There is an on-line process for this via the VMD's website: <https://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/sis/default.aspx>

In the case of food-producing fish the medicine must be authorised in a food-producing species. FVS and BVA are aware that at least one formaldehyde product is licensed in several Mediterranean countries.

In addition to guidance on user safety, including appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), clients should be made aware that the prescribed product is unauthorised in the UK and the implications thereof.

Use as a biocide

Formaldehyde's use as a biocide in the absence of live fish, for example for the disinfection of facilities or equipment, does not fall within medicines regulations. Fish farmers, as professionals, may use industrial grade formaldehyde in this way without veterinary involvement.

Formaldehyde is also used in other livestock industries as a fumigant, disinfectant and for pest control. Definitions of biocidal product types may be found here - https://ec.europa.eu/health/biocides/biocidal_products/product_types_en

Last updated: March 2021