

DEFRA advice to owners regarding the use of anti-TB drugs on camelids suspected of having TB

DEFRA's advice is that suspect clinical cases of TB should be notified to Animal Health and culled rather than treated with anti-TB drugs.

Owners need to be aware of the risks posed by treating suspect cases. Effective treatment of TB in humans is quite a complex, long and costly process involving a six-month course of at least three different drugs. To our knowledge, the effectiveness of such drugs and protocols has never been properly evaluated in South American camelids.

Assuming that an infected camelid will consistently receive the right dose of the appropriate drugs over a long enough period, it may remain infective to humans and other animals for some time.

Many treatment regimes, whilst seemingly capable of resolving the clinical signs of TB, will not result in a complete microbiological cure (elimination of all the bacilli) and may result in latent infections and potentially the development of drug resistance, resulting in serious public and animal health risks.

Additionally, owners need to be aware that by treating animals for TB they are jeopardising the only method of control currently available to infected herds (testing and slaughter of any positives) due to the suppressive effects the drugs may have on the immunological responses detected by the ante-mortem diagnostic tests. Animal Health may, therefore, be unable to undertake any TB testing of infected camelid herds if they become aware that owners are administering anti-TB drugs to some of their animals.