

Call for evidence launches on pet flea and tick treatments in UK waterways

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New drive could help reduce environmental impact.

A new call for evidence to address the presence of chemicals from flea and tick treatments in rivers and streams across the UK has launched today.

Recent research funded by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) found the application of certain flea and tick treatments by pet owners is contributing to these chemicals being detected in watercourses. This is found to happen through wastewater pathways and when treated pets swim in natural bodies of water.

Monitoring by the Environment Agency has found concentrations in surface water that frequently exceed toxicity thresholds for aquatic insects. Residues have also been found in river sediments, fish tissue, wild bird nests and coastal waters, suggesting multiple pathways by which contamination may occur.

These medications play an essential role in protecting both animal and human health against fleas and ticks and the diseases they may carry. However given the increasing evidence of environmental contamination, the VMD is now considering changing how these medications are sold.

This would mean these medicines would only be available from vets, pharmacists, or Suitably Qualified Persons (SQPs), ensuring that trained professionals can give point of sale advice to pet owners on correct use and disposal.

Water Minister Emma Hardy said:

This Government is committed restoring nature and cleaning up our rivers.

We are making progress on reducing the presence of forever chemicals in our waterways and this call for evidence is another important step.

These treatments play a vital role in pet health and welfare, but it is right that we look at whether they should only be made available for sale via medical practitioners who can advise the public on their correct usage.

VMD's Chief Executive Officer, Abigail Seager said:

We know that fipronil and imidacloprid play an important role in protecting pets and people from parasites and the diseases they can carry. However, these substances are entering our waterways and may be having wider environmental impacts.

As part of the call for evidence we want to hear as many perspectives as possible to ensure future decisions help us maintain appropriate availability of veterinary medicines on the UK market, while protecting animal health and the environment.

Professor Jason Weeks, Chair of the Pharmaceuticals in the Environment Group

I am pleased to see the VMD taking forward a distribution category review for these medicines. This work is fully in line with the cross-government Pharmaceuticals in the Environment roadmap and is an important step in ensuring that environmental concerns are considered in a timely and evidence led way. It is encouraging to see momentum building and real progress being made on this issue.

The call for evidence is seeking views on the data on environmental contamination, and information on how any potential changes to their supply routes might affect animal welfare, pet owners, businesses, and access to these medicines.

Animal welfare remains paramount, and continued access to effective flea and tick treatments for pet owners is a key priority. A full ban on sale is not being considered.

The call for evidence delivers on commitments made under the cross-government Pharmaceuticals in the Environment Roadmap launched last year. The new roadmap outlined key actions to address the levels of fipronil and imidacloprid entering UK waterways while protecting animal welfare - which includes commissioning research to better understand this issue and using this evidence to support an international review of environmental risk assessment guidelines.

The call for evidence is UK wide and will be open for eight weeks.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Responses are invited via Citizen Space at [here](#). If you are unable to use Citizen Space, you can download the call for evidence documents and submit your response by email to consultation@vmd.gov.uk.
- The full review process is expected to take around 12 months, encompassing evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement, and impact assessment. A summary of responses will be published within 12 weeks of the call for evidence closing. Any regulatory decisions will be announced, with sufficient time for businesses and others to implement any required changes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-evidence-launches-on-pet-flea-and-tick-treatments-in-uk-waterways>