

What is a Prescription

Why do some medications for your animal need a prescription while others do not? Whether it is a food producing animal or a companion animal, there are legal requirements that need to be followed for our vets to properly dispense medications. Here is a brief overview of what prescriptions are and what is needed for a vet to write you a prescription for your animal(s).

What is a prescription:

A veterinary prescription is a written instruction from a veterinarian that authorizes an animal or group of animals to be provided with a medication, how the medication is to be used, and any necessary meat/milk withdrawals if it is used in food producing animals.

What is needed to get a prescription:

There are four requirements that need to be met by the vet in order to properly prescribe a drug:

1. Establish and meet the conditions of a valid Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR) in regard to a specific animal or group of animals.
 - A valid VCPR is considered to exist only if medical records of the practice contain sufficient evidence of relevant and timely interaction between the vet, animal owner, and animal patient(s).
 - The VCPR is not a signed contractual agreement but rather a working connection and interaction between vet, client, and specific patient or group of animals.
 - All the conditions of a valid VCPR can be found on the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) website.
2. Make an evidence-based determination of medical need.
 - The vet must have established the medical need of the patient, either on an individual or herd basis, prior to prescribing treatment. This medical need is to be based on investigation that results in the vet collecting or receiving significant and relevant information with respect to the health of the animal(s).

- i. This usually includes getting a medical history and doing a physical exam and any appropriate diagnostic testing.
 - It is not necessary that an individual animal is examined in every instance that a vet issues a prescription. Vets may prescribe drugs based on exam and/or relevant knowledge of a group of animals. However, it is required in every instance when a prescription is issued that the vet has relevant medical knowledge to support the established medical need.
 - Animal health protocol:
 - i. Vets may establish animal health protocol(s) for an animal or group of animals in advance or anticipation of predictable animal health event (illness, vaccination, processing, etc.). Such a protocol is a specific direction or series of steps to be undertaken following specific scenario or indication. The protocol made by the vet is considered to establish the medical need for issuing a prescription. However, even when a vet makes a protocol, a prescription must still be issued before medications are dispensed.
 - ii. At the Stettler Vet Clinic, we provide Herd Health programs which include a farm visit, summary of the visit, treatment protocols, and prescriptions specifically designed for your farm. These prescriptions are valid for one year and need to be renewed annually. Please contact us if you are interested in having a herd health visit done for your farm or if you have any additional questions.
3. Complete appropriate documentation in the medical record.
- Medical records need to contain enough information regarding history, physical exam findings, lab investigations, and consultations to justify the prescriptions and use of the drugs. A precise diagnosis or purpose of the pharmaceutical must be recorded.
4. Provide oversight of use and follow up
- As part of the VPCR, the vet who is responsible for making medical decisions with regards to an animal or group of animals must be available for follow up or have arranged a designated alternate. The vet is also responsible for ensuring that the prescribed medication is used properly.

What drugs need prescriptions:

According to the ABVMA guidelines, a prescription is needed for the following categories of drugs and substances:

- All drugs or substances listed in the Prescription Drug List. This list includes antibiotics, narcotics, sedatives, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication (NSAIDs), medications to treat conditions such as kidney disease and heart disease, etc.
 - The complete list can be found at http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodpharma/pdl-ord/pdl_list_fin_ord-eng.php#a2
- Any antibiotics not listed in the Prescription Drug List administered by any route of administration including in feed and water, regardless of their designation by Health Canada
- Any modified live virus vaccine
- Any drug or medication used in an extra-label manner – this is also called ‘off-label use’, meaning that the product is used in a different way than the label indicates, such as using it in a different species, using a different dose, and using a different route of administration
- Any drug which has been removed from its original packaging
- Any drug or substance listed in the Schedules to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act in which case additional conditions will apply

If you want to know more about prescriptions or want to book a herd health for your farm, please give the clinic a call and we would be happy to talk with you. Also, the ABVMA has guideline book called the Council Guidelines regarding Prescribing, Dispensing, Compounding and Selling Pharmaceuticals which can be found online that contains all the information regarding veterinary prescriptions in Alberta.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) also has information on their website regarding vet prescriptions, particularly for antibiotics since veterinary medicine is doing its part for prudent use of antibiotics.