

# Read the Label

Details make a difference in using animal health products successfully.

by *Deana Hardee, DVM*

**P**roduct labels and package inserts, though often overlooked and discarded, contain vital information, which is a valuable tool when it comes to understanding animal health products.

For products to meet our expectations and generate desired results, we must not overlook the basics, such as what the product is, how it's used and the potential side effects. Product labels contain all of this information and much more.

Most animal health product labeling follows a similar format. Knowing more about the following label components will help you navigate through the information.



**Product Description:** First, you'll see the name of the product and the active ingredient, which is primarily responsible for providing the effect. Most commonly, it is located just beneath the trade name. For vaccines, antigens present will be listed. Here you will also see if the vaccine is killed, modified-live, a combination of the two, etc. Product concentration is described next to the active ingredient information. Depending on the product, concentration could be described in terms of milligrams

per milliliter (mg/ml), grams per ton (g/ton) a percentage and so on. This beneficial information enables product comparison from the standpoint of both additional antigen and concentration.

**Indications:** This section describes specific intent for product use and expected coverage when used. Ultimately, we need to ensure this is an appropriate product to use in a particular scenario. For example, maybe we need to know if it is safe for pregnant animals or labeled for pinkeye treatment. The indications section contains an immense amount of information and should never be overlooked.

When reviewing indications, keep in mind that no product is 100% efficacious. There's a clause on certain product labels (i.e., vaccines) which specifies that it should be used in "healthy animals." This information is relevant to note. We shouldn't expect the same vaccine response from animals that are malnourished/mineral deficient, experiencing a high parasite burden or suffering from other maladies. From a physiological perspective, if the animal's immune system is overwhelmed with other needs and distractions, it will be less likely to adequately respond to the vaccine being administered.

**Directions for Use/Administration:** This section is straightforward but can be the source of a big mistake if not followed correctly. Here, you gain insight about how the product should be mixed (if necessary), as well as the required dosage, location and route of administration. Improper dosing may result in an inadequate response or product failure. Generally, dosing tables based on animal weight may be present

in this section for antibiotics and parasiticides. For vaccines, you will also find out whether a revaccination, or booster, dose is required.

**Storage Conditions/Contraindications/Cautions/Warnings/Precautions:** This information is usually buried at the bottom of a product label or package insert but is important to read. Depending on the product and section listed above, you will find information regarding adequate storage, safe handling, potential adverse reactions produced in the animal and descriptions of when to avoid using the product, etc.

Residue warnings are sometimes listed in this section but often appear in a separate section named with this title. This is a MUST-read and MUST-understand section because it highlights the required withdrawal periods, both for meat and milk. Withdrawal periods represent the time it takes for a product (vaccine, dewormer, antibiotic, etc.) to be cleared from an animal's system. The meat and/or milk from the animal can be utilized for human consumption after the required withdrawal time is observed. Take extra care to recognize that different routes of administration can result in different withdrawal times for some products.

Don't just trash product boxes and package inserts. Product names vary, and so do their labels. Please read carefully and contact your veterinarian with any questions regarding animal health products. **HW**

**Editor's note:** Deana Hardee is a technical services veterinarian at Merck Animal Health. Copyright © 2022 Merck & Co., Inc., Rahway, NJ, USA and its affiliates. All rights reserved. US-NON-220700014