

## National Equine Therapeutic Use Exemptions (NETUEs) – a guide

In equestrian competitions run under Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) rules, most medications are prohibited at the time of competition, based on the notions that horses should compete on their own merits without unfair advantage and, more importantly, that horses must be protected from being made to compete when ill or unfit to do so. The FEI Clean Sport Campaign, agreed at the 2009 FEI General Assembly, signalled a new approach to medication control. The Campaign aims to provide those involved in equestrian sport with the information and tools needed to comply with drug control regulations (see [www.feicleansport.org](http://www.feicleansport.org)). The FEI has now required the anti-doping and medication control programme to be taken up at national level by the disciplines that come under the FEI banner and testing of horses in national level competitions will in future be carried out much more frequently than in the past.

The FEI's Equine Prohibited Substances List, under which the British Equestrian Federation's National Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication Rules operate, divides prohibited drugs into two categories: *Banned Substances* and *Controlled Medication Substances*. Banned Substances are agents deemed to have no legitimate use in equine medicine and/or a high potential for abuse, e.g. human antipsychotic agents, such as fluphenazine, and anabolic steroids. Their very presence in a horse is automatically taken as evidence of doping. Controlled Medication Substances are drugs that are recognised as therapeutic in the horse, but which should nevertheless not be present in the horse at the time of competition.

At FEI events, if a horse needs treatment, permission must be obtained from the Veterinary Delegate (Veterinary Commission at major events) before Controlled Medication Substances are administered (in dire emergencies, retrospective permission can be sought). The use of Controlled Medication Substances at this time usually necessitates withdrawal of the horse from the competition. However, upon the advice of the Veterinary Delegate, the Ground Jury can permit horses that have been treated to compete if it is considered that the agents administered will not have a performance-enhancing effect or prejudice the welfare of the horse. If permission to compete is granted and the horse is later subject to medication control testing, should the drug administered under the Ground Jury's permission be detected, provided that it is present at a concentration consistent with the agreed dose rate, no penalty will be incurred. Permission for the administration of Controlled Medication Substances must be requested by the use of an FEI Equine Therapeutic Use Exemption 1 (ETUE1) form, which will be signed by the Veterinary Delegate and the President of the Ground Jury if treatment is sanctioned.

**In competitions under national rules** there is no equivalent to the Veterinary Delegate so the decision as to whether or not to compete with a horse that has been treated with a prohibited substance must be made by the Person Responsible (PR) for the horse who must endeavour to avoid breaching the BEF's National Equine Anti-Doping Regulations.

At national level therefore:

- if a horse requires treatment with a Controlled Medication Substance at or close to a competition, the PR should discuss his/her desire to compete with the treating vet so that, if possible, medications can be used that will no longer be present in **the horse's system by the time of competition**.
- When a Controlled Medication Substance is administered, the treating vet should complete a National Equine Therapeutic Use Exemption (NETUE) Medication Form, which must be handed to the Testing Vet at the time of testing, should this occur.

- The PR then has 10 working days within which to apply for an NETUE in full, using the BEFAR NETUE Form.
- Should the horse that has been treated test positive for the administered agent, the BEFAR Technical Committee will, if it has received a valid NETUE application, consider whether
  - there is sufficient evidence that it was legitimately given to the horse for therapeutic reasons;
  - treatment would have prejudiced the welfare of the horse or have been likely to affect performance (i.e. the same decision that would have been made by the Veterinary Delegate in an international event);
  - the Controlled Medication Substance was present in concentrations consistent with the stated dose rate and time of administration.

If there is sufficient evidence that the substance was legitimately given to the horse for therapeutic reasons and it would have been unlikely to prejudice the horse's welfare and/or have affected performance and it is present at an appropriate concentration, no medication control offence is likely to be deemed to have occurred.

**Important note:** The use of Banned Substances will not be permitted under any circumstances.

Undoubtedly, riders will turn to their vets for advice as to whether they should compete their horses following treatment and in advising them, the **veterinarian should consider**, firstly, whether the drug is likely to be present at the time of competition (for a number of agents, the FEI has published a list of detection times that define time intervals for those commonly-used medications to fall below significant levels of detection – see [http://www.feicleansport.org/Detection\\_Times\\_Lab.pdf](http://www.feicleansport.org/Detection_Times_Lab.pdf)) and secondly, whether it is likely to affect the horses welfare and/or performance. In formulating a withdrawal time for a medication, it must be borne in mind that the detection times are formulated using a limited number of horses on particular management regimes; since individual horses may vary in their rate of drug excretion the withdrawal time should include an extra safety margin to allow for this.

It must be remembered that a positive medication control test for a Controlled Medication Substance will result in disqualification from the event at which the test was taken, as well as a fine and often a suspension, in addition to the adverse effect on the rider's reputation. As a result, it is probably prudent to err on the side of caution in advising PR's as to whether it is likely to be safe to compete.

The FEI and BEF's leading principle that the welfare of the horse must come first should be guiding in treating competition horses and the wider effects of drugs beyond the immediate aim of treatment must be borne in mind. For example, whilst the treatment of urticaria with corticosteroids is rational, it must be remembered that these agents have powerful anti-inflammatory properties that are likely to be deemed to have adverse welfare/performance-enhancing effects if present in a medication control sample.

Examples of situations in which the BEFAR Technical Committee is likely to look favourably on the finding of a Controlled Medication Substance are (i) a horse suffering from mild colic that is treated with hyoscine butylbromide<sup>1</sup> (*Buscopan* but not *Buscopan Compositum*) prior to the day of competition and responds satisfactorily, (ii) an animal that sustains a minor wound in which a small volume of local anaesthetic is used to facilitate suturing.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the commonly-used *Buscopan Compositum* contains, in addition to hyoscine butylbromide, the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug metamizole (dipyrone) and the use of this is unlikely to be sanctioned so close to competition by the BEFAR Technical Committee.

Please note that the Committee will not grant NETUEs for long term treatment of chronic conditions.

Drugs that do not feature on the FEI Equine Prohibited Substances List may be present in horses at the time of competition but the treating vet must ensure that preparations used do not contain Prohibited Substances in addition to the one being used for therapy. A good example is procaine penicillin, where the penicillin is not prohibited but the procaine is and can result in a positive test for several weeks after administration.

The FEI Clean Sport website (address above) is a useful resource for veterinarians treating competition horses. The database of the FEI Prohibited Substances List can be found there and it is also available as a free 'app' for smart phones for reference in the field. NETUEs can be downloaded from Member Body websites or from the BEF website.