



## **BHA NOTICE: BISPHOSPHONATES UPDATE**

The BHA, in conjunction with the independent, industry represented BHA Veterinary Committee, would like to update industry stakeholders in regard to the potential administration of bisphosphonates to horses under the age of three years and six months in international racing jurisdictions. This is a particular consideration during the sales period.

The use of bisphosphonates in young horses carries an unknown risk, due to the limited scientific research that has been completed to date. Evidence suggests, in both humans and animals, that bisphosphonates should not be administered to juvenile athletes. The actions of bisphosphonates include effects on bone remodelling and anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving effects, which may predispose racehorses to potentially catastrophic skeletal injuries.

The BHA has led the way for international jurisdictions by prohibiting their use in young horses, with the intention to protect the welfare of our equine athletes. The following Rule was made effective on 10 August 2017 (previously Schedule (B)3 of the old Rules of Racing):

### **Code 9: Running requirements code: Health Requirements Paragraph 7**

7.2 A horse must not have been administered any bisphosphonates:

7.2.1 before the horse is aged three years and six months, or

7.2.2 on raceday or any of the 30 clear days before

**Any horse which is administered bisphosphonates under the age of three years and six months is permanently ineligible to race in Great Britain.**

Unless research is undertaken which can demonstrate the efficacy and long-term safety of bisphosphonates in racing Thoroughbreds, the BHA is unlikely to change this requirement. Other jurisdictions are discussing similar penalties.

This Rule is currently monitored through the results of sampling and through medication records. The BHA and other racing regulators continue to work with regulatory laboratories and scientists to determine the most appropriate forms of testing and detection levels for bisphosphonates, as we do for other Prohibited Substances.

### **International Jurisdictions**

The International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA) published identical requirements in the [International Agreement on Breeding, Racing and Wagering](#) in February 2019. The following countries are signatory to these requirements: Austria, Brazil, Chile, Cyprus, Germany, Hong Kong, Iran, Ireland, Korea, Lebanon, Macau, Malaysia, Mauritius, Morocco, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain and Turkey.

Jurisdictions in the United States and Australia have recently introduced similar Rules, and it is the understanding of the BHA that France Galop will shortly follow suit.

Whilst we cannot be held responsible for the speed of uptake of legislation by other regulators, we make every effort to be proactive in encouraging international harmonisation.



## Purchase of non-GB bred Thoroughbreds

As there has been a significant lag between the implementation of the BHA Rule and the implementation of the Rule in some international jurisdictions, there is a risk that non-GB bred horses which are purchased for racing in Great Britain may test positive to bisphosphonates. Due to the action of the drug, horses under the age of three and a half years may test positive for over a year post-treatment, as there is no screening limit in place for this age group. **Should such horses be found to have been administered bisphosphonates under the age of three years and six months, they will be permanently ineligible to race in Great Britain.**

## Sales Houses

BHA-badge testing is currently available from major UK Sales Houses. This testing targets anabolic and anti-inflammatory drugs resulting in increased integrity and assurance for purchasers. An additional bisphosphonate screen is now being offered as part of an extended BHA badged testing service. Prospective purchasers should make enquiries with individual Sales Houses as to the testing available.

Whilst the BHA does not have jurisdiction over Sales Houses or horses in international jurisdictions, we have for some time had an agreement with Keeneland (USA) for Permanent Import testing, which now includes a bisphosphonate screen. We are currently working with France Galop to provide assurances for purchasers by instigating similar, harmonised testing by the French approved laboratory. Where appropriate, the BHA will liaise with any other Sales Houses (whether that be through BHA testing or otherwise) to provide assurance for British purchasers of non-GB bred horses.

It cannot be construed from the results of a Sales House test that another sample taken later from the same horse will give the same result. However, evidence to date would suggest that horses which have returned a negative result at Sale are unlikely to subsequently test positive, provided no further administration has occurred.

Note: [BHA Elective Testing](#) for bisphosphonates is available.

## Consultation and Communication

Prior to the Rule taking effect, the BHA consulted with international racing jurisdictions, including discussion at a meeting of the European Horseracing Scientific Liaison Committee. The National Trainers Federation, Racehorse Owners Association and British Equine Veterinary Association were also consulted. The new Rule was communicated to trainers, owners, breeders, vets and international stakeholders in advance of publication.

## Further information

- 1) [New Stand-Down Period: Bisphosphonates](#) (July 2017)
- 2) [BHA Notice: Bisphosphonates](#) (May 2018)
- 3) J McLellan (2017) Science-in-brief: Bisphosphonate use in the racehorse: Safe or Unsafe? *Equine Veterinary Journal* 49(4) 404-407