



## Pharmacy Department

# Medicines Containing or Derived from Animal Products

### Background

Some patients may not want to receive medicines which contain animal products for religious or ethical reasons.

### Which medicines contain animal products?

Some medicines contain ingredients derived from animals, usually pigs or cattle.

Examples include:

- Heparin-type medicines to prevent or treat blood clots
- Animal (porcine or bovine) insulins
- Pancreatic enzyme supplements
- MMR vax PRO® (a type of Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine)
- Treatments to help the lungs of pre-term babies develop
- Gelatin capsules
- Epoetins

Some medicines contain animal derived products as part of their manufacture (known as 'excipients'), such as:

- Lactose – from cow's milk
- Shellac – from insects
- Stearic acid – sometimes from animals

### Which patients may be affected?

Patients who may not want to receive drugs of animal origin include:

- **Buddhists:** May wish to follow a vegetarian diet.
- **Hindus:** Most do not eat beef and some will not eat egg/chicken. Some will be strict vegetarians.

- **Muslims:** Pork is forbidden, other meat must be slaughtered according to the Halal ritual.
- **Jews:** Shellfish, pork and rabbit is strictly prohibited. Porcine derived medication is normally only an issue if taken by mouth.
- **Sikhs:** Many are vegetarian and, in particular, will not eat beef.
- **Rastafarians:** Many are vegetarian. Pork and shellfish are strictly forbidden.
- **Seventh Day Adventists:** Many are vegetarian. Others are not vegetarian but do not consume pig products, and some also avoid red meats.
- People who follow a **vegetarian/vegan** diet for other reasons such as **ethical reasons**.

As a general rule Muslims are not allowed any form of pork, but when there is no suitable alternative and there is a risk of health deterioration, Islamic law does allow medicines derived from pigs. One of the principles of Islamic law states: "Necessities overrule prohibitions".

Pork is strictly forbidden in the diet in Judaism but food and medicines not taken orally are not considered 'eating'. Thus there are no restrictions regarding injections. In the ill patient, porcine derived oral medication is allowed if it's not considered 'edible'.

The Vegan Society website states that vegans avoid using animals 'as far as is practicable and possible'. They acknowledge that it isn't always possible to make a choice that avoids the use of animals, and sometimes there may not be an alternative to taking a prescribed medication containing animal-derived ingredients. They do not recommend that people avoid taking medicines prescribed by their doctor but encourage discussion about possible alternatives to medicines containing animal-derived ingredients with healthcare professionals.

**You may wish to discuss these issues with your doctor, pharmacist or your religious leader if appropriate.**

### **Are there any alternatives?**

Other medicines *may* be available. In some cases other medicines are available but they may not be as effective, or may not be suitable for you, or may have more side effects. In other cases there aren't any alternatives.

### **What are the alternatives?**

- **Heparin-type medicines:** In some cases you can have a treatment that does not come from pigs. In other cases there may be an alternative but it may not be suitable for you, or as effective, or it may have more side effects. In other situations there is no alternative.

- **Insulin:** Most people are treated with human insulin. If you change from animal insulin the dose may need to change and you may need to check your blood sugar more often.
- **Medicines to treat diseases of the pancreas:** There are no alternative treatments.
- **MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccine:** A vaccine that doesn't have any ingredients obtained from pigs is available. Ask your doctor about this option.
- **Treatments to help the lungs of pre-term babies develop:** There are only two drugs available. One comes from pigs and the other from cows.
- **Gelatin capsules:** Ask the pharmacist if there is a different form of your medicine such as syrup. If not we may be able to give you a similar medicine with the same effects.
- **Epoetins:** All epoetins are derived from hamster cells. There are no equivalent alternative treatments.

## Where can I find out more information?

Ask to read the patient information leaflet that came with your medicine. It should tell you what the medicine contains, usually in "Section 6: What is in this medicine?"

If you are concerned about any of your medicines, please speak to your nurse, midwife or doctor who can arrange for you to discuss this with a pharmacist.

## About this leaflet:

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If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email [pals@dchft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@dchft.nhs.uk)



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