

Equine Medical Advisory - Phenylbutazone

To: All New York Licensed Thoroughbred Trainers and Veterinarians
From: Dr. Scott E. Palmer, Equine Medical Director
Date: February 21, 2023

The Horseracing Integrity & Safety Authority (HISA) announced its intention to begin drug testing of Thoroughbred racing across the United States on March 27, 2023, should their proposed rules become effective. Until the Horseracing Integrity & Welfare Unit controlled medication and anti-doping regulations are implemented, the existing New York State Gaming Commission Rule 4043.2 remains in effect.

In December 2019 the Racing Medication & Testing Consortium reduced the recommended threshold for phenylbutazone from 2mcg/ml to 0.3 mcg/ml of serum or plasma. In March 2020 the New York State Gaming Commission amended Rule 4043.2 to correspond. There has been no subsequent change since.

There was a single adverse Thoroughbred phenylbutazone finding between the 2020 amendment through 2021. Last year, in 2022, there were 10 adverse Thoroughbred phenylbutazone findings. In the first six weeks of 2023 there have been three adverse Thoroughbred phenylbutazone findings.

There are two paragraphs in the Commission's rule that, taken together, define the permissible use of phenylbutazone in proximity to a race:

4043.2 (d) Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). One clinical dose of either flunixin (e.g., Banamine), ketoprofen (e.g., Orudis) or phenylbutazone (e.g., Butazolidin) is permitted to be administered in a single intravenous injection until 48 hours before the scheduled post time of the race in which the horse is to compete.

4043.2 (h) No other drugs or medications (including procaine) may be administered by any means within one week of the scheduled post time of the race in which the horse is to compete. In this regard, substances ingested by a horse shall be deemed administered at the time of eating and drinking. It shall be part of the trainer's responsibility to prevent such ingestion within such one-week period.

It is not permissible to administer any form of phenylbutazone within 7 days leading up to the race, other than a single intravenous injection administered no closer than 48 hours prior to the scheduled post time of the race.

If an oral dose of phenylbutazone is administered within 7 days of the race, with or without an intravenous injection of phenylbutazone at 48 hours, there is an increased risk for an adverse finding for phenylbutazone due to variability in absorption and clearance of the drug following an oral administration, or the result of a cumulative effect of multiple doses given in close proximity to a race.

Should there be any questions about this advisory, please contact me directly.

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