

H16 - Disease and treatment of piglets



Treatment of a piglet

A healthy piglet

1. Is round and has a smooth and shining coat of hair.
2. Has normal faeces.
3. Holds its head and ears normally.
4. Has untroubled breathing.
5. Is not lame.
6. Lies normally in the creep area.
7. Comes to the teat when the sow lactates.

It is important to inspect the piglets daily and it is particularly important in the first week after farrowing, as immediate intervention will save lives.



Piglets that were not treated

Piglets may be sick if

- They do not come to the udder.
- They isolate themselves from their litter mates.
- They have spiky fur.
- They walk with their head tilted.
- Their ears point backwards.
- They are lame.
- Diarrhoea is observed in the pen or on the pigs.

Additional comments - Disease and treatment of piglets

During your daily supervision of the pigs, it is important to assess whether to treat or destroy a sick pig. If a pig is still sick after the recommended treatment, re-assess whether further treatment is likely to cure the piglet. If not, destroy the piglet. Pigs suffering from paralysis or a broken leg should be destroyed immediately.

Sick pigs need a warm environment and easy access to water.

See Appendix 16 - Checklist - treatment aids (example).

1. A piglet with spiky hair or greasy skin is sick and it may be weakened by hunger. Treat the piglet if it is sick. A pale piglet may be deficient in iron or be sick. Check the strategy for supplying iron - is the need of all piglets covered? See H17 - Iron, castration, tail docking and tooth grinding.
2. If you observe diarrhoea in a pen, check if only one piglet is sick or the entire litter is sick. If all piglets are sick, the sow may not give enough milk or the temperature of their environment may be too low. Do not move sick pigs and do not walk directly from one pen with diarrhoea into other pens as diarrhoea is highly contagious. Pigs suffering from diarrhoea need a lot of fluid quickly; provide extra water and possibly an electrolyte solution or A38. See H23 - Feeding of piglets.
Treat the piglets according to the instructions of the herd vet.
3. If a piglet hangs its head, it probably suffers from cerebrospinal meningitis or otitis media. Both infections can be treated with antibiotics and, if necessary, pain relief. A swollen ear may be an ear haematoma. This is caused by a burst vein and cannot be treated.
4. A normal breathing is calm, untroubled and has no murmurs.
5. If a piglet is lame, it may suffer from arthritis, a hoof abscess or it may have been crushed or stepped on. Arthritis and hoof abscesses are treated according to the instructions of the herd vet.
6. If a piglet does not lie normally in the creep area, it may be sick. However, the creep area may also be too warm or too cold. See H13 - The environment of the piglets.
7. If a piglet does not come to the teat when the sow lactates, it may be sick or there may not be sufficient room by the udder, or the piglet may simply not be hungry. See H2 - Functional requirements to the farrowing pen.

Once you have located and treated a sick piglet during your inspection of the pens, it is important that you operate with a system in which you can easily identify the piglet for treatment the following day, for instance by marking it with a colour spray. Different colour codes or different places for a colour line can be used for denoting different types of medication or disorders. Put a clothes-peg on the sow card / gate of the pen, so that a certain location of a clothes-peg means treatment of a piglet the following day. Remove the clothes-peg when treatment is complete. See the picture on the front of this fact sheet.