

H25 - Prevention and handling of shoulder lesions



Sow in appropriate body condition with no shoulder lesions

Avoid shoulder lesions! They represent a welfare problem and reduce productivity.

1. Keep sows and gilts in appropriate body condition in the entire cycle. Body condition upon transfer to the farrowing facility is the most important.
2. Check the sow's log - give her a shoulder jacket / mat upon transfer to the farrowing facility if she has previously suffered from shoulder lesions.
3. The floor in the farrowing facility must be dry, solid and even.
4. Adjust the crate to give the sow as much freedom of movement as possible and make sure she gets up frequently.
5. Examine the sows daily for reddening/shoulder lesions.
6. Flies on the shoulder crest may be an indication of an incipient shoulder lesion.
7. Provide a rubber mat, shoulder jacket or pads upon reddening of the skin.
8. Initiate treatment in case of shoulder lesions degrees 1 or 2.
9. You **must** transfer a sow with degree 3 to a hospital pen with a thick bed of straw or a soft rubber mat.
10. A sow with degree 4 **must** be destroyed.

See Appendix 23 - 10-point-plan for handling of shoulder lesions and Appendix 26 - Destruction with correct use of a captive bolt pistol and exsanguination.



Sow with shoulder lesion. She has not been given a rubber mat

Shoulder lesions develop if

- The sow has a poor body condition score.
- The soft bedding - for instance a rubber mat - has not been fastened and slides from under the sow.
- The floor in the farrowing pen is wet and stays wet (sow is wallowing).
- The shoulder jacket does not cover the shoulders.
- The sow lies down a lot due to, for instance, weak legs or the temperature in the facility being too high.
- The crate is not adjusted regularly.

Additional comments - Prevention and handling of shoulder lesions

Shoulder lesions can be compared to pressure sores in humans. They arise from long-term pressure on the tissue. A particularly exposed area on the sow is where the bones lie just beneath the skin.

In sows, the majority of shoulder lesions develop within the first weeks post-farrowing.

It is important that the sow has an optimum body condition score and that the time the sow lies down is reduced.

1. Thin sows lack the protective layer of fat over and around the scapula and are therefore highly susceptible to shoulder lesions. Sows in body conditions 1 and 2 are considered risk sows and should be transferred directly to a pen with a rubber mat. Frequent feedings (5-8 times a day) have been seen to reduce the frequency of shoulder lesions.
2. Sows that have once suffered from shoulder lesions have a significantly higher risk of developing lesions again in the subsequent lactation period. Therefore, always note the degree of shoulder lesions in the sow log and use this information in your culling strategy.
3. A wet lying area makes the skin soft and less robust against rubbings on the surface. Fully slatted floors result in an uneven pressure on the shoulder, and as a result there is a greater risk of shoulder lesions developing in pens with fully slatted floors compared with farrowing pens with partially slatted floor. Check for irregularities in the floor by feeling the floor surface with your fist.
4. A sow must be able to get up and lie down without problems as she will otherwise lie down for longer than she normally would. Set the farrowing crate in the outer position when the sow is transferred to the facility and only adjust inwards at farrowing. 1-2 days after farrowing, adjust the crate to the outer position, but without the sow being able to turn around. Several daily feedings will make the sow stand up more frequently.
5. Immediate intervention in due time is essential to stop the development of a shoulder lesion. You must examine the sows for shoulder lesions on both sides daily. The easiest time to do this is during feeding when all sows are standing up. Pay special attention to thin or sick sows and large sows with difficulty getting up in the farrowing crate.
6. Fluid is excreted when the shoulder reddens. This will attract flies to the shoulder and may therefore be an indication of an incipient shoulder lesion.
7. Intervene at incipient reddening and swelling of the skin to prevent the condition from deteriorating further. Give the sow a soft bed in the form of straw (hospital pen), a rubber mat, shoulder pads or jackets. Check daily how the lesion develops. The drawback of rubber mats is that they may make it difficult for the sow to get rid of heat and consequently the immediate environment will turn humid.
8. Always keep sows with shoulder lesions degree 3 in a hospital pen. Wash inflamed shoulder lesions thoroughly in soapy water and rinse with clean water, and treat daily with, for instance, ointment or a spray containing antibiotics.
9. Degree 4 shoulder lesions are considered neglect and must not be present in any herd. If a sow with a degree 4 shoulder lesion is delivered for slaughter, the pig producer will be reported to the police. If you see / feel the following before sows are picked up for slaughter, there is a risk that the sow has had a degree 3 or 4 shoulder lesion:
 - Large firm swelling (more than 5 cm in diameter).
 - The skin on the shoulder is immovable.