



FACTSHEET

The Sick Pig

Medical conditions pose a particular challenge to the veterinary practitioner when carrying out a clinical examination. It is even harder for pig keepers, basically pigs are not easy to examine. The thick layer of fat under the skin accompanied with their squealing can make the use of a stethoscope unrewarding; however the rectal temperature is often a useful sign. The skin reveals some signs in white pigs which can be helpful.

Keepers should record;

- Number of pigs on the holding
- Number of pigs in affected group
- Number of pigs affected
- Number dead
- Age and sex of affected pigs
- Predominant signs shown

Medical conditions are classified into groups by their predominant affected system. Namely: Enteric, Neurological, Respiratory, Circulatory, Skin and Urinary. Helminths and routine worming, and vaccination will be discussed separately in another fact sheet.

Enteric diseases

The predominant signs shown are diarrhoea, anorexia, pyrexia (fever) and vomiting.

These conditions normally are diagnosed by a dung sample. Rectal swabs in very baby pigs may be helpful but are not normally sufficient to provide a comprehensive diagnosis. Backyard pigs are likely to become infected by faeces on visitor's boots. Commercial pig-men, however well meaning should be kept away from backyard pigs or given new boots and overalls.

As a rule of thumb epidemic enteric disease is seen less in backyard pigs than in commercial pigs but problems with nutrition are more common in backyard pigs.

Neurological Diseases

The predominant neurological signs are very varied. They range from; mild ataxia with a head tilt to convulsions. Pig keepers should be aware that diseases affecting other systems when advanced will show terminal neurological signs.

Respiratory diseases

The predominant signs are: Dyspnoea (difficulty breathing), increased rectal temperature, blue coloration of the ears and coughing. Respiratory diseases are extremely important in commercial pigs especially those kept inside. A proper diagnosis must be made and the appropriate treatment given. However respiratory disease is not nearly so important in backyard pigs. It is mainly seen in growing pigs or newly arrived young gilts and boars.

Circulatory diseases

The predominant signs are: Increased respiratory rate, increased heart rate, blue extremities e.g. ears, coughing on exertion. These signs are very similar to those seen in pigs suffering from respiratory disease. There are not many conditions which only affect the circulatory system.

Skin diseases

There are a number of skin diseases that can affect smallholder pigs, from bite wounds to bacterial infections you can vaccinate against. We often suggest taking some pictures and emailing them to us at the surgery as a first course of action to start ruling out potential causes.

If you have any concerns about ill health or injury in your pigs, then please call the surgery to discuss further.

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