

Pig Owner's News for the

Hunter



Diarrhoea

October 2021

Piglets are susceptible to diarrhoea at both the neonatal stage and the post weaning stage. It is a common cause of mortality and is often closely associated with poor hygiene, inappropriate husbandry, a stressful environment and inappropriate feeding practices. Piglet scours (diarrhoea) are estimated to cost the Australian pig industry more than \$7 million each year.

With piglet scours, the faeces contain excess fluid. They may also contain blood, undigested food, mucus and membrane pieces from the intestinal lining.

Common causes of piglet diarrhoea in Australia include the following:

- *E.coli* – common within the first week of life and again the first week after weaning.
- *Clostridial enteritis* – causes acute scouring within the first week of life
- *Coccidia* – this parasite commonly causes scouring between 9 days of age and weaning
- Salmonellosis – causes diarrhoea in weaned piglets – 6-20 weeks of age
- Rotavirus – usually 3-6 weeks of age
- Cryptosporidiosis

Diarrhoea in pre-weaned piglets is common and can spread rapidly to all piglets in the litter. Piglets quickly become dehydrated and often die. The piglets are often seen to huddle together shivering. The skin around the tail and rectum may be wet or they might vomit. As the diarrhoea progresses they will become dehydrated with sunken eyes and leathery skin. The diarrhoea may not be obvious and the only visible signs may be scalding of the anus or drying crusts or faeces on the thighs. Septicaemia, toxæmia, rapid dehydration and loss of vital electrolytes cause death unless you treat the piglets quickly.



The weaning process can be stressful for piglets which then makes them susceptible to bacterial and viral infections. There is also the loss of maternal antibodies which they have been receiving in the sows' milk up until weaning. Potential sources of diarrhoea at this stage include *E.coli*, Rotavirus, salmonellosis and *Campylobacter*. Diarrhoea in these older piglets is usually less severe with lower mortality rates. These weaners may lose weight, be dehydrated and have a watery diarrhoea.

Control and Prevention of Piglet Diarrhoea

Herd management has a great influence on the incidence and severity of diarrhoea outbreaks. Maternal antibodies provided through colostrum are the main protection against piglet diarrhoea. Good health and minimising stress assists with prevention of disease. It is important to ensure adequate colostrum intake in the first hours after farrowing.

There are vaccines available against multiple strains of both E.coli and Clostridial disease. Sows and gilts should be vaccinated before farrowing to enhance immunity and production of antibodies in milk. The sows' require vaccination 6 weeks and 3 weeks prior to farrowing. E.coli vaccines only protect the piglets for the first 5 to 7 days of life.

Scouring is more common in large litters. This may be due to insufficient colostrum or poor teat access. Milk replacers, particularly if they are allowed to get stale or contaminated, may increase the incidence of scours.

Poor hygiene will allow bacteria and other pathogens to proliferate in the environment. Initial infections can be greatly reduced by a good level of hygiene and farrowing pen management. Unhygienic farrowing pens may have too many bacteria for the piglet's natural defences. Be careful not to contaminate adjoining paddocks/pens from manure on your boots, shovels, clothing etc. Use disposable overalls when handling or treating scouring piglets. Always wash your hands after handling scouring piglets. Disinfect shovels and buckets etc between pens.

Farrowing huts should be disinfected between litters and all bedding changed. Cold, wet and draughty conditions are likely to exacerbate infections. Farrowing huts should be kept enclosed, dry and warm during the colder months. Where possible rotate your paddocks between litters and wean piglets onto clean ground.

Inappropriate or excessive feeding of sows can further exacerbate infections. Sows that have respiratory disease, lameness or mastitis are more likely to have piglets that scour.

Early weaning (before 6 weeks of age) can increase the likelihood of post-weaning scours. Heavier pigs at weaning that have adjusted to creep feeding are less likely to become infected.

Treatment of Diarrhoea

It is important to diagnose the infective cause of the diarrhoea to be able to treat the affected piglets effectively and appropriately. This usually involves your vet examining the piglets and taking a faecal sample for analysis and culture. This will determine if antibiotics are indicated.

Scouring piglets need a clean, warm and dry environment. Your vet may advise you to give oral electrolytes.



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