



Early Identification of Sick Pigs in the Nursery

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TAKE HOME MESSAGES:

1. Limit stress and competition when transitioning piglets to feed.
2. Evaluation of all animals each day leads to earlier detection of sick pigs.
3. Early detection of sick pigs is associated with increased treatment and likelihood of recovery.

Transitioning Piglets to Solid Feed

The first 36 hours after weaning are the most critical time for a piglet to locate feed and water and for caretakers to identify developmentally younger, at-risk piglets. These piglets are animals that were weaned at an earlier age and may struggle transitioning to a dry diet. Gruel feeding is a practice that mixes water with dry feed, creating a paste that is more digestible. Gruel feeding can be helpful in introducing slower-starting pigs to solid feed. (Bates et al., 2023) Gruel can easily grow bacteria, so it is important to clean and sanitize the grueling equipment often (Dritz et al., 2000). Minimizing stress and competition among piglets when starting solid feed is critical in successfully starting nursery pigs. It is also important to check the water pressure of the drinkers; if the water pressure is too high or too low, pigs will be discouraged from drinking and may become dehydrated. According to PIC (2023), a nursery pigs flow rate should be 500 mL per minute. An easy way to measure the flow rate is with a spray

Identification of Healthy Piglets

To identify a sick or compromised pig, it is important to know what a healthy pig looks like. An acronym known as B.E.S.T. is a systematic approach to assessing the piglet's Body, Eyes/Ears/Nose, Skin/Hair, and Temperament. (Kramer et al., 2021)

When assessing the body, the pigs should be in good condition (smooth, full flesh) and structurally sound (no signs of lameness). A healthy piglet appears filled out, and its belly should appear full. The backside of the pig should be free of wounds and clean without signs of scouring (diarrhea). The eyes, ears, and nose should be bright and open, free of any discoloration or discharge. The skin and hair should be smooth, clean, and flat, with minimal lesions to the head and neck area. In general, pigs are curious animals. They should be bright, alert, and responsive when approached with their nose in the air and interested in their environment. (Kramer et al., 2021).

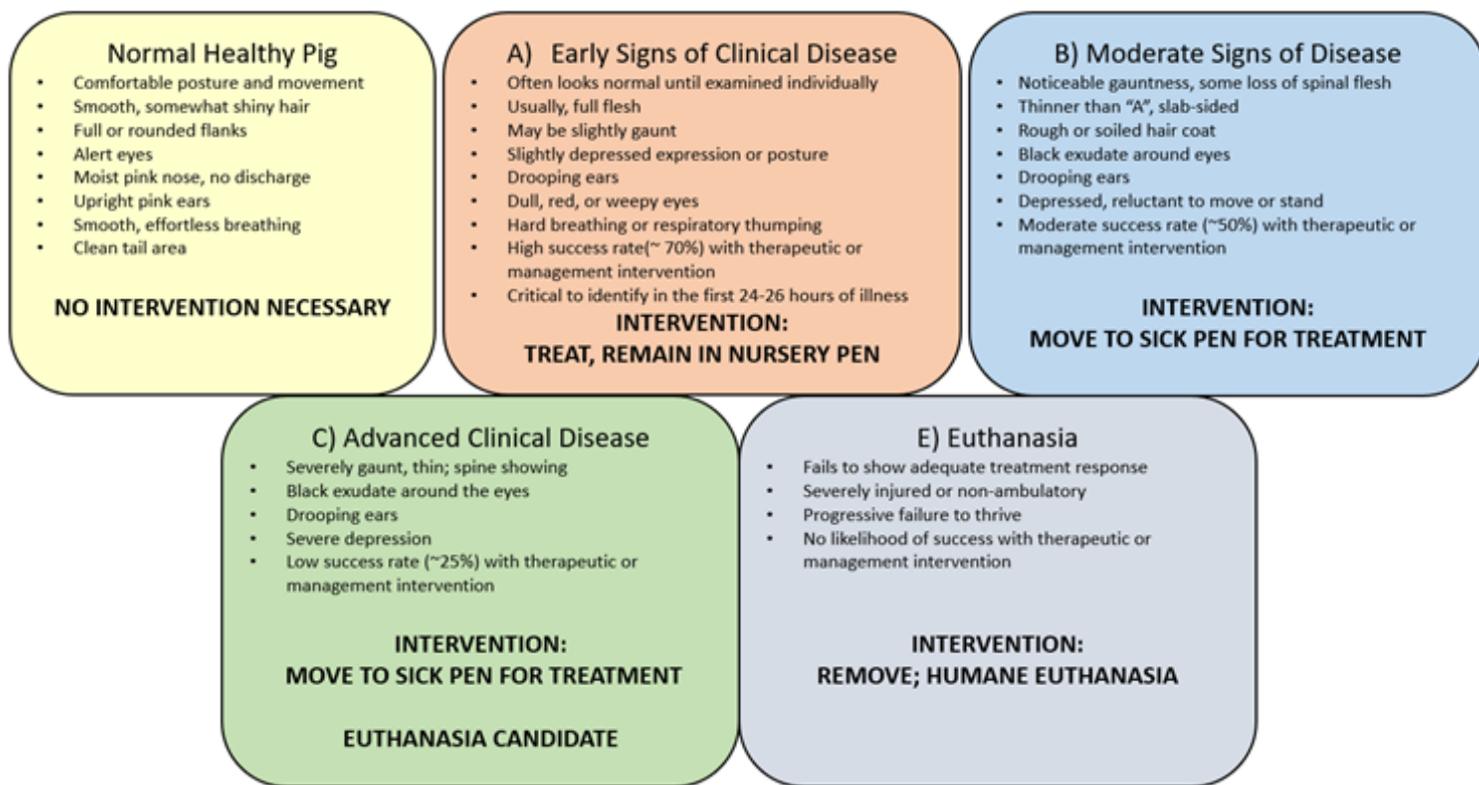
Identification of Sick or Compromised Pigs

Pigs that do not fit the above description of "healthy" may be sick or compromised and require increased care. Daily evaluations of all pigs in a barn are critical for the early identification of sick pigs. Early identification of sick or compromised pigs increases the success of treatment and the likelihood of recovery. To identify at-risk pigs, evaluate the animals' behavioral pattern, body condition, abdominal shape, skin appearance, appetite, and look for signs of malnutrition or dehydration, such as sunken flanks with the spine, hip bones, and ribs showing. If an animal is depressed, has a thin body condition, is gaunt or fuzzy, huddles with pen mates, or has sunken eyes, further attention is necessary.

Figure 1 demonstrates a classification system that is used by many different producers to better assess the pigs in their barn. This system can be broken down into five different categories. A normal healthy pig, early signs of clinical disease or an “A” pig, moderate signs of clinical disease or a “B” pig, advanced signs of clinical disease or a “C” pig, and euthanasia candidates or an “E” pig. The different criteria are shown in Figure 1. Figures 2 & 3 provide more examples of clinical signs associated with sick or compromised pigs.

These at-risk pigs are often off feed and water and may need to be separated from their pen mates to allow easier access to feed and water. Depending on the clinical signs, compromised piglets may or may not require antimicrobial treatment. It can be useful to separate the animal and make sure they are getting the appropriate amount of food and water for their energy requirements prior to starting treatment (Dritz et al., 2000). Consult with your veterinarian for treatment recommendations based on your pigs’ clinical signs.

Figure 1. Classification system used to train caregivers, adapted from the Husbandry Education Program. (Galina et al., 2013)



Figures 2 & 3. Adapted from Identification of the Sick Pig. Kramer, S., Gemus-Benjamin, M. (2021) Early and Systematic Observations to Improve the Welfare of the Sick or Compromised Pig. (Permission to use illustration from Kramer and Gemus Benjamin, 2021)

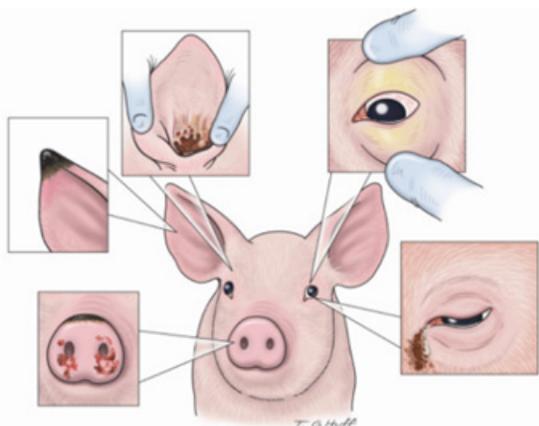


Figure 2

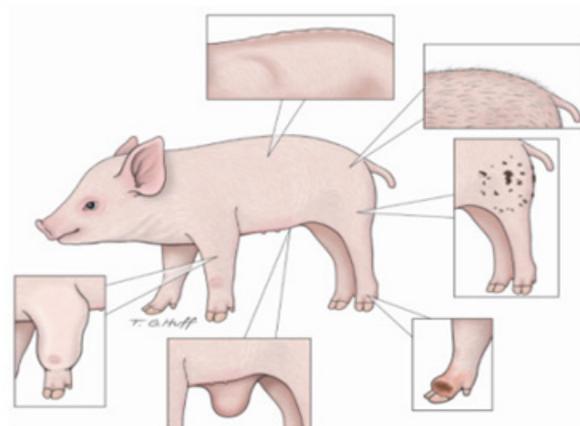


Figure 3

REVIEWER: Dr. Chris Rademacher

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