

Lameness is a condition that frequently results in pig keepers seeking veterinary advice. Like many health issues associated with pigs there are many potential reasons why a pig or group of pigs become lame, caused by both infectious and non-infectious causes.

## INFECTIOUS

- *Mycoplasma hyosynoviae*
- *Erysipelas*
- *Streptococcal* species
- Glasser's disease
- Foot rot/Bush foot
- Joint ill
- Foot and Mouth and other notifiable diseases

*Lameness can present with a variety of clinical signs. These can appear in isolation, or in combination with varying degrees of severity.*

## CLINICAL SIGNS ASSOCIATED WITH LAMENESS

- Reluctance to stand
- Swollen joints
- Visible fracture
- Pain/discomfort when palpated
- "Dog-sitting" position
- Shaking/shivering
- Difficulty moving
- Off food
- Not accepting boar at service/reluctance to serve
- $\pm$ fever
- Other signs associated with specific diseases



The extensive list of causes of lameness means that covering all in detail is beyond the scope of this factsheet, so we've picked out some key causes to discuss;

**traumatic injury, foot problems and *Erysipelas*.**

## TRAUMATIC INJURIES

Lameness can result from many different types of trauma. Some are more outwardly visible due to external injury (see photo below) while others more subtle.



Traumas could be as a result of fighting between individual or groups of pigs, for example accidental mixing of groups or boars competing for females in season. Alternatively, there may be elements of pig accommodation that have become worn, eroded or damaged resulting in sharp or roughened edges.

Initial action should be to assess the type of injury and treat appropriately:

- Clean and possibly dress open wounds
- Apply topical treatment to open wounds
- Provide antibiotic cover and anti-inflammatories as necessary

Following this the primary cause of the trauma should be identified and rectified – separate mixed animals or if not possible provide adequate enrichment as distraction and consider masking agents to alleviate the drive to fight; mend or remove damaged accommodation.

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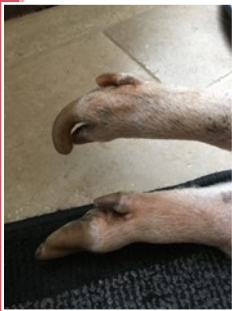
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**Foot infections** frequently occur due to defects in or damage to the sole or hoof wall. Damage may be as a result of traumatic injury as discussed above but may also follow extended periods of wet weather when hooves become softened facilitating penetrating injury or flaking and cracking of the hoof wall. Dietary issues, such as biotin deficiency, can also predispose hooves to cracking, allowing infection to enter.

Foot infections vary in severity dependent upon the depth to which the infection penetrates and the underlying structures, such as tendons and bones, that have been damaged as a result. In extreme cases infection can enter the blood stream causing septicaemia. Bush foot refers to an abscess that has burst out at the coronary band.

Response to treatment is variable and dependent on the severity of the infection and what underlying structures have been damaged. The use of an appropriate antibiotic plus an anti-inflammatory to manage the infection and pain is indicated. Foot paring, poulticing and bandaging may improve prognosis for severe cases. Unfortunately, the worst affected individuals that show a poor response to treatment may require euthanasia for welfare reasons.



Overgrown claws can occur in pigs that have little exposure to hard surfaces or get minimal exercise so hooves do not wear evenly. This may also be a sequel to pain or discomfort elsewhere causing uneven weightbearing across all hooves. Congenital deformities causing claw overgrowth do occur but are less common.

Overgrown hooves can be pared to regain normal shape. This should be done in combination with addressing accommodation and exercise as well as any underlying painful conditions.

## ERYSIPELAS

A bacterial infection caused by *Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae*, an organism that is found in the environment and present in most pig herds.

Infamous in its presentation with diamond shaped, red, raised skin lesions *Erysipelas* can cause lethargy, inappetence, fever, reproductive issues and sudden deaths. In its more chronic form lameness is a common presentation.

Acute infections respond well to antibiotics, particularly penicillin and related compounds, however chronic lameness cases have a poorer response even with the addition of an anti-inflammatory. Prevention can be achieved effectively by regular vaccination as well as managing the hygiene of accommodation and exposure to other species such as sheep and turkeys which can also carry the bacteria.



If you identify a lameness issue in one or more of your pigs which you are unsure as to the cause or if initial first aid has proved unsuccessful, please contact your veterinary practice to arrange a consultation.

If you identify blisters (vesicles) on the coronary band of the hoof of a lame animal, with or without blisters in or around the mouth contact the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) 03000 200 301.

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