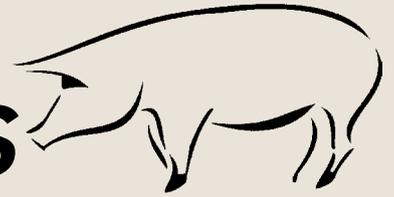


Vet's Questions



& Answers



Got a problem with your pigs and need some expert, practical advice? Well, let us know and our resident vet, Bob Stevenson, will be happy to help

Bad drinking habit

Q I discovered a dead pig this morning, and wondered whether I need to perhaps give something to the 17 remaining in the group of young growers to prevent any more from dying?

All in the group have been unwell for about three weeks, and I've noticed some of them walking stiffly and not being inclined to eat. Then, following a course of antibiotic, plus an anti-inflammatory, recovery appeared spectacular and everything seemed fine until today's sudden.

Ian, Mamhilad, Wales

A As this farm happened to be relatively nearby, I arranged to conduct a post mortem examination and discovered classical features of a pig condition well known as Glasser's disease. This is caused by a bacteria called *Haemophilus parasuis*, which has a predilection for the smooth membranes lining joints, the chest plus the abdominal and heart 'sac'.

Everything started to fit together, with the group having been unwell and walking stiffly some weeks earlier. Stiffness is one of the typical signs



Do you expect me to drink that?

when the bacteria attacks the synovial membranes in the limb joints. But why did this individual, that had apparently recovered, suddenly relapse and die?

In viewing the group, I suggested that the pigs were not obtaining enough suitable drinking water having, as they did, to wade, chest-deep, through their wallow to obtain water from their drinker. They weren't inclined to slake their thirst by drinking from the wallow fluid, and who can blame them?

Glasser's often needs one or more of a number of known stressors to kick start the disease process. I concluded that the pig that had died – and was found to have pleurisy at autopsy – simply wasn't able to cope with the poor provision of drinking water during a hot spell of weather; this was the final stress on this vulnerable animal. Glasser's can also be diagnosed in older pigs in high health herds, where vaccination can be used as part of a preventive plan.

Footprint or what?

Q I noticed a sow kept outdoors with a large patch on her side, and another sow with a darker, large patch also. What is the cause and is there a treatment that's needed?

Mark, North Gwent.

A I'm glad to get a chance to answer this one because it allows me to eliminate the majority of other skin diseases. The appearance of the large patch on the side, and a somewhat smaller one on the sow's back, is not characteristic of the 'diamonds' of the skin form of erysipelas. The condition known as pityriasis rosea occurs in younger pigs, and the outlines of the patches are different.

The adult form of greasy pig disease and sarcoptic mange produce very different lesions. So what are the remaining likely causes? In fact, there's only one other thing that it could be, and that's a fungal infection. This condition,



Discoloured patches like this are symptomatic of the fungal infections associated with ringworm.

one type of ringworm, is quite often observed in outdoor sows. I think, in most veterinarians' view, there's a connection with straw and vermin!

Fortunately, this condition seems to result in only minor or even no adverse effects on pig health. Irritation, with resulting scratching and rubbing – a feature of other skin conditions, especially Sarcoptic mange – is not present with this type of ringworm. The size of the patches

can vary from very small areas, through 'footprint'-sized patches, to a size where one 'ring' might cover the whole of the side of a large sow!

Actual medical treatment is not usually required because natural resolution takes place in nine weeks or so. There are no authorised (licensed) treatments available. However, if cases are occurring as a regular feature, then a veterinary surgeon might need to prescribe an antifungal treatment under the prescribing 'cascade'. This would be necessary if sows, gilts or boars from a herd that has regular cases, sends pigs to shows or pedigree sales etc.

The spread of such a disease to other pigs at shows or via the sale ring must be prevented. As with ringworm in other species including cattle, horses or cats, this disease is zoonotic. This means that there's the potential, no matter how remote, for humans to catch ringworm from infected pigs. Hand-washing and other hygiene practices should be the 'order of the day'.