



HEALTH

Tail docking

For a variety of reasons pigs may bite each other's tails. This can lead to infection, abscesses in the spine, severe pain, lameness and carcase condemnation. Where other management options have proven ineffective, your veterinary surgeon may recommend tail docking as a method to help prevent tail biting. Where tail docking is recommended, its necessity must be reviewed regularly (quarterly) as part of the unit's Veterinary Health Plan and there must be a concerted effort to provide manipulable materials in all pens.

Equipment/info required		Personal safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying container • Cauterising tail docker or clippers • Spare batteries/gas • Disinfectant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wire cleaning brush • Marker • Piglet holding container 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ear plugs (indoors) • Gloves • Dust mask

Preparation

- Ensure the operator is familiar with the manufacturer's instructions
- **Cauterising docker**
 - Check blades are clean and that they heat correctly
 - Check batteries are charged or that sufficient gas canisters are available
- **Clippers/pliers**
 - Clippers must be dedicated for this procedure and not used for teeth clipping as well
 - Ensure that they are sharp and clean
- Load equipment and materials into waist belt pouches or carrying container and proceed to farrowing area
- Ensure that the operator is physically separated from the sow.



Tail docking equipment

Outline of work

- Secure equipment container in a safe and convenient location at first farrowing pen or hut
- Collect all piglets into holding container
- Ensure that cauteriser blade is fully heated
- Pick up piglet by back leg above hock or around hips
- Hold tail steady
- Remove an appropriate length of the tail by gently squeezing docker handles
- Cauterise straight across the tail; do not try to cut through as if with scissors, allow heat to cauterise
- Mark piglet and return to holding container
- If using clippers, disinfect between piglets
- Regularly check and remove debris using designated wire brush from cauterising blade and guide
- Repeat above steps for remainder of litter
- Proceed to next litter of piglets thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting equipment between litters
- Ensure all tails are docked to a uniform length within a unit; having a marker on the clipper to indicate the unit's standard tail docking length can be useful.



Piglets are born with a pair of needle-sharp milk teeth at each of the front four corners of their jaws. In some circumstances these teeth can damage the sow's teats when suckling and make them tender so that she may refuse to suckle her piglets. They can sometimes also inflict savage facial wounds on their litter mates leading to infection. Teeth clipping/grinding should not be the first line of defence against these problems, but where other management options have proven to be ineffective, your veterinary surgeon may recommend blunting the tips of these teeth either by clipping or grinding. Where clipping or grinding is recommended, a unit specific policy must be developed which identifies which individuals, litters or batches of piglets should have their teeth reduced. This policy must be regularly reviewed (quarterly) and form part of the unit's Veterinary Health Plan.

Equipment/info required	Personal safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teeth clippers/grinders • Surgical disinfectant • Dipping container • Marker • Piglet holding container • Waist belt/carrying device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety glasses • Ear plugs (indoors) • Gloves • Dust mask

Preparation

- Familiarise yourself with your farm's policy as to which piglets/litters should have their teeth reduced
- **Clippers**
 - Check that teeth clipper blades are clean and sharp and meet along complete length of blade; replace regularly to ensure teeth are clipped and not crushed
 - Pour fresh surgical disinfectant into container for dipping clippers
 - Place clippers into dipping container and secure lid
- **Grinders**
 - Ensure the operator is familiar with the manufacturer's instructions
 - Grinders must be well maintained as they tend to rapidly become less abrasive
- Load equipment and materials into waist belt pouches or carrying container and proceed to farrowing area
- Ensure operator is physically separated from sows.

Outline of work

- Secure equipment container in a safe and convenient location at first farrowing pen or hut
- Place piglets in a holding container, either all together or a few at a time



Teeth clipping and grinding equipment

- Pick up piglet by back leg above hock or around hips
- Cradle piglet firmly between operator's forearm and body
- Hold piglet's head still and mouth open using correct grip:
 - Insert first finger at side of piglet's mouth to hold piglet's mouth open
 - Place second and third fingers at angle to side of head
 - Place the clippers parallel to the jawbone and gumline

Outline of work (cont'd)

- Clip the tip of the front needle tooth on the closest side of the upper jaw
- Take care not to cut gum, lips or tongue and avoid exposing the pulp cavity
- Clip the tip of the rear tooth of the same pair
- Repeat process for the two lower teeth (one incisor, one canine) on the same side of the jaw
- Adjust grip to access other side of piglet's jaw and repeat steps
- Check evenness of clipping by rubbing finger over clipped surface; make sure no sharp points of teeth are left, re-clip if necessary
- Check that the gum is clean
- If grinding make sure you only blunt the tip rather than grind down a significant portion of tooth
- Mark piglet and return to holding container or proceed with next piglet task
- Repeat above steps for remaining piglets, dipping clippers in disinfectant between piglets
- On completion of litter return clippers to disinfectant dip
- Complete sow litter record if applicable.

Additional information

- Using teeth grinders reduces the risk of shattering the teeth
- In some circumstances, teeth reduction on only the top teeth can provide the same benefits
- The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 state:
 - The procedure may only be carried out on an animal that is aged not more than 7 days (Farm Assurance Schemes have an age limit of 3 days)
 - The procedure must consist only of the uniform reduction of the corner teeth by either grinding or clipping so as to leave an intact smooth surface
 - The procedure may only be carried out where measures to improve environmental conditions or management systems have first been taken to prevent tail-biting and other vices, but there is still evidence to show that injury to sows' teats or to other pigs' ears or tails by biting has occurred.
- Farm Assurance Schemes will need you to keep records/photos of any outbreaks of facial scarring, udder damage or reluctance to suckle in order to justify any on-going policy of teeth reduction.



Piglets in holding container



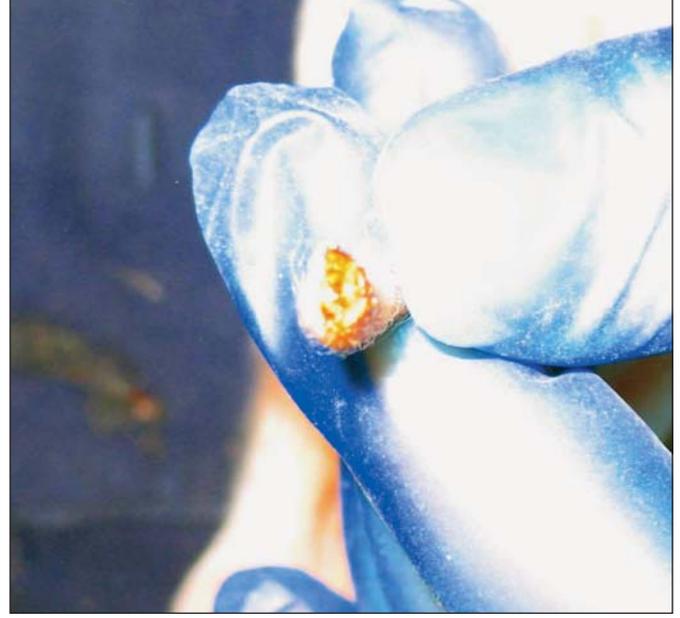
Cradle piglet firmly between operator's forearm and body

Reference documents

- Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Pigs
- The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007
- BPEX work instruction 8: Handling and restraining pigs.



Holding the tail steady



*Do not try to cut through as if with scissors,
instead allow heat to cauterise*

Additional information

- Keep records of incidences of tail biting such that there is up to date evidence of the need to continue docking
- If tail biting continues amongst tail docked pigs additional advice and measures should be sought to help address the problem
- The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 state:
 - The procedure may only be carried out where measures to improve environmental conditions or management systems have first been taken to prevent tail-biting, but there is still evidence to show that injury to pigs' tails by biting has occurred
 - The method used must involve quick and complete severance of the tail
 - An anaesthetic and additional prolonged analgesia must be administered where the animal is aged 7 days or over.
- Most farm assurance schemes which permit tail docking specify that it should be carried out within the first three days of life.

Reference documents

- Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Pigs
- The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007
- BPEX work instruction 8: Handling and restraining pigs.