

H17 - Iron, castration, tail docking and tooth grinding



Administration of iron

Administration of iron to piglets helps ensure optimum growth and health.

1. Administer iron within the first week of life.
2. Administer iron orally or by injecting it into the neck or groin.
3. If you use other products, such as iron powder, it can be difficult to check that all piglets receive adequate amounts.
4. If you use drinking iron, check drinkers regularly for blockage or dripping valves. You may have to administer iron via injection to some piglets. A piglet turns white in case of iron deficiency.



Castration

Castration performed without anaesthesia must be done within the first 2-7 days of life. Supreme hygiene is essential to avoid infections.

1. Use ear cups or ear plugs.
2. Change blades on the castration knife routinely, for instance between each batch or after 50 pigs, and disinfect.
3. Provide pain relief either before castration or at the same time as the castration procedure.
4. Place the piglet in an appropriate the work position.
5. Cut as small openings as possible, squeeze out the testicles and cut the spermatic cord 0.5-1 cm below the testicle.
6. Check for intestinal prolapse (inguinal hernia).
7. Gently return the piglet to the pen as quickly as possible.
8. Clean all castration tools after use.



Tail docking

Routine tail docking is prohibited.

1. If there is a documented need for tail docking, dock as little as possible - and no more than half - of the tail. Do this within the first 2-4 days of life.
2. Heat the tail burner, so the tail is burned and not cut.
3. Make sure you burn the tail all the way through the tail.
4. Check that the tail is burned correctly and that there is no bleeding.
5. Gently return the piglet to the pen as quickly as possible.
6. Clean and disinfect the tail burner after use.



Tooth grinding

Routine tooth grinding is prohibited. Tooth grinding is not necessary under normal circumstances.

1. If there is a documented need for tooth grinding, grind the outer canine teeth.
2. Be careful not to damage the gums.
3. If you need to grind the teeth, do so within the first four days of life.

Additional commentes - Adminstration of iron

1. Piglets' weight quadruples in the first three weeks after birth, which means that they have to form a vast amount of blood in this period. As their daily iron requirement (approx. 7 mg) is significantly higher than what they receive through the sow milk (approx. 1 mg), the innate iron depot (approx. 50 mg) will be used after approx. 1 week.
2. It is recommended that you inject iron or administer it orally to ensure that all piglets get iron.
3. The risk of arthritis increases significantly if the level of hygiene is not sufficiently high.
4. Iron powder must be administered over several days. Pale pigs may be an indication that iron supply is too low. If you use drinking iron in the form of supplementary feed, you must ensure that the piglets have sufficient access to fluid in the form of sow milk.

Additional comments - Castration

1. The sound level during castration exceeds the legal limit, and ear defenders are therefore necessary.
2. It is essential to keep the tools clean by cleaning them in hot water and disinfecting them in spirits between each castration. This helps prevent infections and inguinal abscesses, which are often caused by poor hygiene. See H29 - Essential statutory requirements to the farrowing facility.
3. A QS requirement for pain relief during castration came into force on June 1, 2009. Treatment must be administered via injection behind the ear either at the same time as castration or before castration (max. 60 minutes before). Pain relief drugs are prescribed by the vet. See Appendix 18 - Pain relief during castration.
4. Castrate piglets as early as possible within the first 2-7 days of their life. Only staff trained and experienced in castration is allowed to perform the procedure. Castration after day 7 of the piglet's life **must be performed by a vet**, and must be performed under prolonged analgesia. See Appendix 18 - Pain relief during castration.
5. The smaller the opening, the lower the risk of infection. Note that it is only legal to CUT the spermatic cord. Mortality is significantly lower among male pigs compared with male pigs that have had the spermatic cord torn.
6. During castration, intestinal prolapse should be avoided. If it happens:
 - Intestinal prolapse through the castration hole: destroy the piglet.
 - Intestinal prolapse inside the skin (hernia / inguinal hernia): closely observe the piglet afterwards. If the hernia grows too big, destroy the piglet.
7. Return the piglet to the pen as quickly as possible to avoid stressing the piglet. Mortality increases if the piglets are not returned gently to the pen.
8. For more information on cleaning, see the section below on tail docking.

Additional comments - Tail docking

1. It may be necessary to dock piglets' tails. If tail docking is performed without anaesthesia, it must be done within the first 2-4 days of the piglets' lives and no more than half of the tail must be docked. See H29 - Essential statutory requirements to the farrowing facility.
2. Use electricity or gas to heat the burner. Change knives when the blades are no longer sharp - make sure you have spare knives ready. Keep the knife clean to ensure an optimum function of the burner.
3. Do not be so busy that you have to pull/tear the last piece of the tail.
4. A bleeding tail is a portal of entry for infections in joints, along the spine and in the brain.
5. No further comments.
6. Tail docking must be hygienic to avoid inflammation of the brain and tail or arthritis. Therefore keep the tools clean. Use a stiff brush to clean the knife.

Additional comments - Tooth grinding

1. It may be necessary to grind a piglet's teeth to protect litter mates and the sow's udder from being scratched by their sharp canine teeth. **It is illegal to clip pigs' teeth**. See H29 - Essential statutory requirements to the farrowing facility.
2. If you grind too much or damage the gums, the piglets have an increased risk of contracting arthritis or blood poisoning.
3. See H29 - Essential statutory requirements to the farrowing facility.