

H17 – Iron, castration and tail docking

Correct handling of piglets improves survival rates.

1. Iron

- Administer iron either by injection in the neck or groin or orally in the form of iron powder, paste or in the drinking water.
- If you use a needle, change needles between each litter.
- Needle-free injection lowers the risk of infection and blood poisoning from transmission of virus and bacteria between pigs and batches
- Injection: Administer 200 mg iron within the first week
- Orally: Follow the instructions on the label
- Supply additional iron to pale pigs in the farrowing and weaner units.
- A pig may be deficient in iron without displaying any clinical symptoms.

2. Castration

- Castration is only allowed under pain relief and per the Danish scheme (local anaesthetic)
- Local anaesthetic is effective after min. 5 minutes and for max. 30 minutes
- Change needles between each litter to minimise transmission of infection
- Castration is only allowed within the first 2-7 days of life
- Place the piglet in the castration bench at the correct height
- Make small incisions to minimise the risk of infection
- Change blades after each litter – a sharp knife makes easier to make small incisions
- It is only legal to cut the spermatic cords
- Collect the testicles
- Disinfect blade/tongs between each piglet
- Return the pig to the sow immediately to reduce stress
- Castration is performed correctly when the wound is healed and is not swollen 24 hrs after the procedure
- Do not castrate piglets suffering from diarrhoea.



Difference between a new needle (to the right) and a needle used 6 times (to the left).



Inflamed castration wound.

3. Tail docking

Tail docking must not be carried out routinely, but only when there is evidence that tail biting has occurred.

Requirements for documentation: Evidence of tail biting in the herd or on one of more of the farms receiving the pigs. An action plan must be available documenting preventive measures implemented against tail biting.

The need for tail docking must be documented min. once a year.

- Piglets can be tail docked with the first 2-4 days of life
- Dock as little as necessary and no more than half of the tail.

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1.	Piglets' weight quadruples the first 3 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 the amount they absorb from the sow milk (approx. 1 mg), the innate iron content (approx. 50 mg) will be used after roughly 1 week.
1.	Iron deficiency affects immunity and thereby mortality and gain.
1.	Haemoglobin levels in blood must be approx. 90 g per litre in order not to restrict the piglets' growth capacity.
1.	If the piglets are too young when they receive iron injection, they may develop arthritis with iron embedment around the joints. These piglets are impossible to treat; consult your vet.
1.	Be careful when you inject iron: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct needle size (1 cm long, approx. 1 mm thick) (19G-21G) • Correct location (groin or neck) • Correct amount. Always check instruction for use.
1.	Maintain a high level of hygiene to keep transmission of virus and bacteria to a minimum.
1.	Iron in drinking water: Check drinkers regularly for blockage or dripping valves.
1.	Towards the end of lactation, piglets' iron intake increase via the feed. A high feed intake is therefore essential.
1.	If you suspect low haemoglobin levels in blood, have your vet make an analysis on your farm.
2.	Provided the piglet is correctly anaesthetised, the sound level during castration will be not exceed the limits for when to use ear defenders.
2.	Wear gloves – preferably two sets of gloves – when you administer local anaesthetic.
2.	Only people who have completed a course are allowed to administer local anaesthetic in connection with castration. Certificates must be available at all times. Castration after day 7 of the piglet's life must only be performed by a vet.
2.	Keep all tools clean and sharp. Use two scalpels with one always placed in disinfectant. Switch scalpels each time you castrate another piglet. Disinfect scalpels/tongs between each castration.
2.	Place the piglet in the castration bench in a good working height – both for administering local anaesthetic and for performing the castration procedure.
2.	Make 2 small vertical incisions to minimise the risk of infection; squeeze out the testicles and cut the spermatic cord without tearing it. Do not tear the tissue. It is illegal to tear the spermatic cord.
2.	Collect the testicles in the DAKA containers.
3.	Heat the tail burner, so that you burn the tail rather than cutting it.
3.	It is important to burn all the way through the tail as there is otherwise increased risk of blood poisoning.
3.	If the tail is bleeding after it is burned, the burner is either too cold or the burning period too short.
3.	Keep the knife in the burner free of ashes for optimum function.
3.	Dock the tail in one even cut to prevent big wounds that take longer to heal.
3.	If tail docking is performed later than day 4, prolonged analgesia must be provided.