

H10 - Nurse sow for underweight piglets



This nurse sow has accepted small piglets

The smallest piglets in particular must be assured of colostrum and access to milk. You can place the smallest piglets with a nurse sow for underweight piglets if you ensure that the nurse sow supplies colostrum to the piglets.

An optimum nurse sow for underweight piglets

1. **Is either** a sow that is finishing farrowing (the nursing piglets can be placed with her immediately after birth).
2. **Or** is a sow that has farrowed min. 12 hours ago (if the piglets have received colostrum from their own mother).
3. The nurse sow has small teats that present well to the piglets. It could be a gilt or a second parity sow.
4. The nurse sow is calm.
5. The nurse sow is housed in a pen with an optimum environment for small piglets.
6. If necessary, put the heat lamp back in the pen and place a thick layer of bedding in the creep area.
7. **It is essential that the nurse sow's own piglets are assured of colostrum either before they are moved or from the recipient sow!**



Not all piglets managed to get to the udder.

Incorrect handling of small piglets.

- Do not place the smallest piglets in a large litter the day after they are born as this increases the risk of them dying.
- The smallest piglets are so weak that they cannot get to the udder and die.

Additional comments - Nurse sow for underweight piglets

Before you move very small piglets, assess whether they are viable and able to handle being moved.

1. You can ensure the supply of colostrum to the piglets by not moving them before they are min. 12 hours old. Another option is to split the piglets into two groups while nursing with their own mother before the smallest piglets are moved. Alternatively, express colostrum for the piglets. The piglets will be able to manage when they have received 3 x 30 ml milk. See H5 - Supervision of farrowing and H7 - Colostrum. It is an advantage to supply colostrum with one hour intervals.
2. You can also ensure colostrum for all piglets by placing the smallest piglets with a sow that is farrowing. Place the large piglets of that sow with other sows that are also farrowing so that they are assured of colostrum. See H7 -Colostrum.
3. A nurse sow for underweight piglets must have a set of teats that the smallest piglets can reach and get into their mouths.
4. A nurse sow must be calm so that the small piglets can get to the udder. Often a first parity sow is less calm than a second parity sow and therefore needs more stimulation to start lactating. If you use a first parity sow as a nurse sow, place the largest piglets with her.
5. The climate in the pen must be optimum so the piglets can stay warm. The pen must be warm, dry and draught-free (see H13 - The environment of the piglets).
6. You can improve the environment of the piglets by letting the small piglets keep the heat lamp and perhaps install an extra heat lamp outside the creep area. Bedding is an excellent method for increasing the temperature. Woodchips are not suitable as they may scratch and thereby increase the risk of umbilical infections and umbilical hernia. You can also add an extra drinking trough for water, electrolyte or other energy sources. See H23 - Feeding of piglets. However, do not supply electrolytes after 1.5 days as the intestines may otherwise shut too soon and as a result the piglets will not be able to absorb antibodies from the colostrum.
7. If the nursing piglets are moved to a sow that is farrowing, the sow's own piglets must be assured of colostrum from the sow they are moved to. The sow must have finished farrowing max. 12 hours earlier.

Fødselsvægt og dødelighed



The figure illustrates the correlation between birth weight and the risk of a piglet dying. Piglets weighing less than 1 kg at birth have a high mortality, but even piglets weighing 1-1.5 kg have an increased risk of dying.

Content of antibodies (mg per ml milk) in colostrum (Klobosa & Butler (1987))

Hours after farrowing	IgG	IgM	IgA
0	96	9	21
12	32	4	10
24	14	3	6
72	4	2	6
168	2	2	5

The table shows that the content of antibodies drops quickly within the first 24 hours.