

Skin lesions



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What do skin lesions indicate?

- Pigs prefer to forage, eat and rest simultaneously.
- There should be enough space and resources for the pigs to allow synchronized behavior.
- Competition among pigs for (limited) resources such as space, feed, water, enrichment material etc. leads to physical interactions that result in skin lesions.

Risks for tail biting

When pigs are competing for (limited) resources this acts as a stressor and animals become frustrated which might lead to tail biting. Skin lesions due to competition for (limited) resources are therefore an indicator to assess the risk for tail-biting.

to be mixed, this should be done at as young an age as possible, preferably before or up to one week after weaning. When pigs are mixed they shall be provided with adequate opportunities to escape and hide from other pigs {Annex I, Chapter II, point D2}



Minimum legal floor area {Art.3, point 1a}

| Live weight (kg) | Total area (m ²) |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| ≤10 | 0.15 |
| 10 - 20 | 0.20 |
| 20 - 30 | 0.30 |
| 30 - 50 | 0.40 |
| 50 - 85 | 0.55 |
| 85 - 110 | 0.65 |
| 110+ | 1.00 |

Note: Listed requirements are not comprehensive. Moreover, there might be stricter national legislation in place.

RISK ASSESSMENT



- ✓ Competition over resources

Legal requirements



Council Directive **2008/120/EC** states "All pigs must be fed at least once a day. Where pigs are fed in groups and not ad libitum or by an automatic system feeding the animals individually, each pig must have access to the food at the same time as the others in the group." {Annex I, Chapter I, point 6}

"All pigs over two weeks of age must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of fresh water." {Annex I, Chapter I, point 7}

"They should be kept in groups with as little mixing as possible. If pigs unfamiliar with one another have

Inspection method (recommended)

- The farmer records skin lesions in the animal unit during his/her daily inspections. It should be recorded as part of the documentation of the farmer's risk assessment in relation to tail docking.
- The official inspector verifies records of the farmer by comparing written/digital documentation with interventions taken by farmer in the farm.
- Additionally, the inspector checks pigs of different age groups and from different pens/groups for skin lesions.
- The inspector reports findings to farmer and in case of discrepancies between legal requirements and situation on farm corrective actions are taken.



Assessment of skin lesions is not so useful within the first week following mixing. Monitoring of aggression due to competition can best take place in a group with an established dominance rank order

Pigs are scored individually for having skin lesions. Definition of lesion includes broken skin, fresh (i.e. bleeding) wounds and healing lesions (scabs). Scar tissue is not included. Stand near the animal and visually assess one side only. Divide the pig's body into two halves and score each half separately:

- Front half (= Ears and head, shoulders, front legs)
- Rear half (= Flank, hindquarters, back legs)

If the majority of pigs shows skin lesions, identify any noticeable pattern in the pen. i.e. lesions on front or rear half. Skin lesions on the front half, indicates competition for space, due to fighting. Lesions on the rear half may be the result of competition for (limited) resources, e.g. for feed.

No or low risk to welfare: No lesions or mild lesions

- A linear lesion with ≥ 10 cm length;
- Or 3 or more lesions with ≥ 3 cm length but lesions in total cover < 25 % of the skin;
- Or a circular area less than 2.5 cm diameter.



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High risk to welfare: Severe lesions

- A circular lesion ≥ 2.5 cm diameter;
- Or lesion that extends into the deeper layers of the skin;
- Or lesions that cover ≥ 25 % percentage of the skin independent of lesion length.



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Source assessment method: [AssureWel protocol](#)



Co-funded by
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If you have any questions or
suggestions regarding this factsheet
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