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What do skin lesions indicate?

- Pigs prefer to live in small social groups and eat, forage and rest simultaneously.
- Mixing of unfamiliar pigs leads to agonistic interactions that can cause skin lesions.
- Rough pre-slaughter handling of pigs (e.g. with sticks or implements with pointed ends) may lead to skin lesions on their bodies.
- Prolonged deprivation of food or water may lead to aggression and frustration that can result in skin lesions due to e.g. biting. 
- Competition for (limited) resources, e.g. water, space or enrichment material can increase the incidence of skin lesions.

Legal requirements

Council Regulation (EC) **No 1099/2009**: Requirements associated with handling and conditions in resting pens are specified in:

{Chapter II, Article 3, Point 2.b-f}: prevention and protection from injury, suffering and pain.

{Annex III, Point 1.8.a, b, d}: pain and suffering due to rough handling or pressure.

{Annex II, Points 1.3. and 1.4.}: design of lairage facilities and inspection of pigs.

{Annex II, Points 2.3.-2.5.}: design of water supply systems, floors.

Note: Listed requirements are paraphrasing the literal text of the regulation and are not comprehensive. Moreover, there might be stricter national legislation in place.

For a more detailed description on the specific requirements, see the "[Review on arrival and lairage management at pig slaughterhouses](#)". 

Inspection method (recommended)

- The official inspector checks pigs in different lairage pens for **skin lesions**.
- The inspector verifies if the skin lesions result from housing in lairage pens (e.g. fighting in pens) or pre-slaughter handling (e.g. with sticks with pointed ends).
- In case of infringements, the inspector reports findings to Business Operators (BOs) and/or Animal welfare officers (AWOs).
- In case of infringements, the inspector verifies the SOPs of the slaughterhouse and corrective actions are carried out to ensure the situation complies with legal requirements in the future.

Location of skin lesions on the pigs' bodies



Skin lesions on the front half (left) of the body indicate fighting. Lesions on the rear half (right) may identify any noticeable pattern of inappropriate management or handling procedures in lairages or due to insufficient resources in the lairage pen.



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.

No or low risk to welfare: No 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.



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.



Source for the assessment method: [AssureWel protocol](#)



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suggestions regarding this factsheet
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