

Tail injuries



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What are iceberg indicators?

Iceberg indicators can be described as animal-based indicators which reflect a multitude of underlying welfare issues. Although animal welfare is a multi-dimensional concept, iceberg indicators provide an initial overview of pigs welfare state, which could help to estimate the risk to animal welfare. Therefore, tail injuries are considered to be a suitable animal-based iceberg indicator to assess multitude welfare issues on-farm

What does tail biting indicate?

- Tail biting is an abnormal behaviour, where pigs bite their penmates' tails. Thus, tail injuries indicate the occurrence of tail biting.
- It is a response to insufficient stimulation and frustration resulting from a variety of negative environmental and management factors increasing pigs' stress level.
- Tail biting is therefore a consequence of multiple factors filling up a '**cumulative risk bucket**'. At a certain level, the bucket overflows, and tail biting starts.



[For more information see the Thematic Factsheet on „Tail biting and tail docking“](#)



Inspection method (recommended)

- The farmer records tail injuries as a sign of tail biting in the animal unit during 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 possible interventions taken by the farmer against tail biting.
- Additionally, the inspector checks pigs of different age groups and from different pens/groups for tail injuries.
- The inspector reports findings to farmer and in case of discrepancies between legal requirements and situation on farm corrective actions are taken.



Pigs are scored individually according to the proportion of injured tails. Tail injury score at farm level: percentage of pigs having tails with wounds.

Note: It is recommended to record whether tails of pigs are docked or not, before tail injuries will be assessed.

No risk to welfare: Intact tails

No sign of damage: Tail is not wounded nor shortened. The tail is curled and the tail tip is flat and has bristles



Moderate risk to welfare: Minor wound

Skin damage of at least 0.5 cm in diameter but not greater than 2.0 cm i.e. a wound not bigger than the size of a ten cent (euro) coin. The wound has fresh blood (a fresh wound), a scab (a recent but healing wound) or both. Anything less than 0.5 cm is not scored



High risk to welfare: Major wound

Skin damage of at least 2.0 cm in diameter (size of a ten cent euro coin) or more than one minor wound (see previous definition). The wound should have fresh blood (a fresh wound), a scab (a recent but healing wound) or both



Source for the assessment method: EU Platform on Animal Welfare, Subgroup Pigs, 2019



Co-funded by
the European Union



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If you have any questions or suggestions regarding this factsheet please contact info.pigs@eurcaw.eu