

Preventing Sick Pigs: An Ethical Responsibility

Pig veterinarians take their responsibility to protect both animals and people very seriously. They do this by preventing and relieving animal suffering and promoting public health. Critical to achieving these goals is the prevention and treatment of disease in the animals under their care. Pig farmers also work closely with their veterinarians to keep their animals healthy and to develop ways to prevent disease in their herds rather than waiting for the pigs to get sick.

Some of the best ways to keep pigs healthy and growing include:

- *Preventing the introduction of viruses and bacteria into a pig farm. This practice is commonly referred to as biosecurity and involves good management, barn design, washing and disinfection, and controlling traffic of pigs, people, vehicles and other items that could carry diseases into a herd.*
- *Understanding the bacterial and viral disease threats that can affect the herd. This can be accomplished through diagnostic tools, which can help veterinarians recommend the best prevention or treatment option.*
- *Enhancing the herd's immunity to diseases by appropriately timed vaccination.*
- *Using antibiotics responsibly under the supervision of a veterinarian to prevent and treat bacterial diseases.*

Even under the best care by pig farmers and their veterinarians, sometimes it's impossible to prevent animals from becoming exposed to bacteria and becoming sick. At certain times, especially during weaning or transporting, pigs can be more susceptible to bacterial infection and illness. This is why taking steps to prevent disease is so crucial to the overall health and well-being of the pigs.

Prevention of disease may include using an antibiotic to prevent the disease before the pigs are outwardly sick and suffering. This practice is referred to as preventive antibiotic therapy.



The use of preventive antibiotics is a short-term management practice under the guidance of a veterinarian. The need to use preventive antibiotics should be re-evaluated periodically with the goal of eliminating any unnecessary or ineffective antibiotic treatment.

For pig farmers and veterinarians alike, the ultimate goal is to prevent disease rather than to have to treat sick pigs. Prevention of disease will reduce the need to use more antibiotics for treatment. The first step is to implement a variety of preventive strategies, such as good husbandry, strict hygiene, regular health monitoring and immunization to optimize pig health. If these efforts are still not enough to prevent illness, then a veterinarian may determine that preventive antibiotic therapy is necessary. As always, any use of antibiotics should be based upon a veterinarian's expertise and their professional relationship with the pig farmer and his/her herd.