

How to handle sick and injured animals

SICK PIGS LIE
DOWN a LOT

The animal must be placed in a hospital pen when needing:

- **Soft lying area** (shoulder lesion, bad leg etc.)
 - o Straw or rubber mat
 - Straw: The layer must be thick enough so that the pig does not come into contact with the underlying floor.
 - Rubber mat: Must yield under hard pressure
- **More heat** (brain infection, unthrifty etc.)
 - o Weaners:
 - Covering + heating lamp or floor heating
 - Sufficient amount of straw
 - o Finisher pigs and sows
 - Covering/heating lamp/floor heating (deep litter)
- More **space and quiet** away from other pigs.
- Easy access to **water and feed**

QUICK CHECK LIST

- ✓ SOFT RESTING area
- ✓ HEAT
- ✓ SPACE AND QUIET
- ✓ WATER AND FEED
- ✓ PAINKILLER
- ✓ ANTIBIOTICS??

A PIG WITH BRAIN INFECTION
MUST BE HELPED WITH EATING
AND DRINKING



WATCH THIS VIDEO WITH
OUR VETERINARIAN
ANDREAS, WHO TALKS
ABOUT HOSPITAL PENS

The law states:

- o Soft lying area in 2/3 of the area
- o Cooling facility and heat source in all hospital pens
- o Minimum one hospital pen always ready to be used
- o Area requirement, see table below:

Animal group	One animal in the pen, m ² per animal		Several animals in the pen, m ² per animal	
	Available area	Soft lying area	Available area	Soft lying area
Sows and gilts	3.5	2.33	2,8 (max 3 animals)	1.87
Pigs, 7-15 kg	0.41	0.27	0.36	0.24
Pigs 15-30 kg	0.69	0.46	0.58	0.39
Pigs, 30-60 kg	1.14	0.76	0.91	0.61
Pigs, 60-100 kg	1.70	1.13	1.29	0.86
Pigs, 100-130 kg	2.05	1.37	1.53	1.02
Pigs, 130-150 kg	2.28	1.52	1.69	1.13

Cf order no 15 of 08/01/2026 concerning animal welfare minimum requirements for housing of pigs.



General area requirements

Animal group	m ² per animal
Pigs, < 10 kg	0.15
Pigs, 10-20 kg	0.2
Pigs, 20-30 kg	0.3
Pigs, 30-50 kg	0.4
Pigs, 50-85 kg	0.55
Pigs, 85-110 kg	0.65
Pigs, > 110 kg	1

Sows		m ² per animal
Sows (up to 17)	First 4	2.8
	Next 6	2.2
Sows (18-39)		2.25
Sows (40 =>)		2.025

Gilts		m ² per animal
Gilts	10	1.9
	Next 10	1.7
	Next 10	1.5

Area requirements for hospital pens

Animal group	One animal in pen, m ² per animal		More animals in pen, m ² per animal	
	Available area	Soft lying area	Available area	Soft lying area
Sows and gilts	3.5	2.33	2.8 (max 3 animals)	1.87
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Hospital pens

Good practice	Why
Clean and dry lying area	Low infection pressure and non-slip The latter is particularly important in case of lameness.
Possibility of cooling	In case of fever, it is useful to be cooled down.
Possibility of heating	Sick animals might get cooled down and need heating so that the body can spend energy on recovery instead of keeping warm.
Clean trough with delicious feed	To increase appetite Drop the liquid feed in the hospital pen and replace with dry feed
Water is easily accessible. If the pig has difficulties walking, it is offered water manually until it is more agile.	The pigs are often put in hospital pens because they have reduced mobility. Ensure that they have drunk enough and avoid dehydration.
Treatment record at the pen: Easy to see when the pig arrived and to follow it	To better assess improvement, worsening or newly arisen complications.
If a sow goes from a hospital pen to e.g. a farrowing unit, the employees are informed that the sow requires extra attention.	To give a weakened sow extra help around farrowing – possibly by giving her a mat if necessary.



Construction, equipping and use of hospital pens

Good examples of construction and equipping of hospital pens depending on the pig's age:

Weaners:

- Deep litter with straw
 - Access to area with slats or concrete floor for cooling down
- 2-climate pen with thick mat of straw* with straw board on the solid floor.
 - Covering and possibly floor heating
- 2-climate pen with soft and yielding rubber mat on the solid floor
 - Covering, floor heating and/or heating lamp



Finisher pigs/young gilts:

- Deep litter with straw
 - Access to area with slats or concrete floor for cooling down
- Pen with thick mat of straw* on solid floor with a straw board at the end of the pen before slats
 - Covering and/or heating lamp in the part of the pen with soft lying area
- Pen with access to soft and yielding rubber mat
 - Covering and/or heating lamp in the part of the pen with soft lying area



Gilts/sows (max 3 animals per hospital pen):

- Deep litter with straw
 - Access to area with slats or concrete floor for cooling down
- Pen with thick mat of straw* on solid floor with a straw board at the end of the pen before slats
 - Covering and/or heating lamp in the part of the pen with soft lying area
- Pen with access to soft and yielding rubber mat
 - Covering and/or heating lamp in the part of the pen with lying area

* The thick mat of straw can also be made from Easy-strø, shavings or a combination of this

When using rubber mat in the hospital pen:

The rubber mat must be soft and yielding and be kept clean and dry. If the mat becomes wet and soiled, it must be scraped clean and dry. You can choose to spread an absorbing material (straw, shavings, Stalosan etc.) on the mat.



The minimum area (see laminated handout sheet) for soft lying area for each pig must be one connected area so that the pig can lie flatly on its side with its entire body in the lying area.

You can choose to attach the rubber mat to the pen floor, and equipment for attaching it can be bought together with the rubber mats.

Sellers of rubber mats:

When choosing a rubber mat, we commend rubber mats from Aalborg Gummivarefabrik who produces and sells several types of rubber mats specially developed for pigs including equipment for attaching them. Search on below page:

<https://aag.world/shop/staldprodukter-til-grise-20c1.html>

The mats are also sold by, among others, P. Lindberg.

When there are pigs in the hospital pen:

The pigs in the pen must be monitored daily, assessed and, if needed, treated according to herd diagnoses. You must ensure that the pigs are able to get up and drink water and eat feed. Alternatively, the pigs must be hand fed/watered until they are again able to get up and walk to the trough.

When the pigs recover after treatment in the hospital pen, we recommend moving them to a relief pen so that the hospital pen **continues to provide room, soft lying area, calm and rest** for the pigs that need to be in a hospital pen.

Remember: A hospital pen is **NOT** a hospice. If treatment is futile, the pig must be euthanised.

Treatment record:

We recommend hanging up and daily updating treatment records at each hospital pen. In this way, everyone on the farm can see how each pig in the pen is treated, how many times it has been treated and whether it is recovering, or if further treatment is futile and the pig therefore must be euthanised.

Forms for treatment records (and list for medicine registration) can be found at our web site.

If the treatment record also contains medicine registration, it must be kept for 5 years.



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Construction and equipping of hospital pen

DYI project – an example as inspiration for constructing a hospital pen

How to convert a pen for young gilts with slats and solid/drained floor into a hospital pen:

- Creating soft lying area:
 - The area of the solid floor can, as needed, be expanded by installing slat closers so that the area corresponds to the area you wish to use as soft lying area in the pen.
 - The area is defined with a board.
 - Soft flooring is created on the solid floor, slat closers ensure easy drainage.
 - Straw
 - Easy-strø
 - Shavings
 - A good mixture of everything
- Access to feed and water:
 - Must as far as possible be away from the soft lying area so that the animals are in this way forced to get up on their feet and so you avoid soiling of the lying area.
- Heat source (possibility must always be present):
 - If the pig can "dig itself down" into the deep litter, this will constitute a heat source (works best with a very, very thick layer of straw).
 - A plate can be placed, resting on the partition walls, across the soft lying area.
 - Heating lamp
- Cooling: Plate or lamp can be removed/turned off, and the pig can lie on the slats.



How to house and handle pigs with hernia

What is a hernia:

A hernia is a bulge from the abdominal cavity through the abdominal wall, around the navel area or groin area. The size and condition of the pig's hernia sac and the pig's general wellbeing are relevant to how the pig must be handled.

Housing of generally unaffected pigs with hernia:

Small hernias without complications: The pig can stay in the pen with the other pigs.

- The pig is thrifty, generally unaffected and with no reduced mobility.
- There are no lesions on the hernia sac.
 - Small, uncomplicated, superficial scratches and superficial lesions are allowed (without redness, swelling and infection).
- If the hernia sac is under 15 cm (handball) on a slaughter-ready pig or under 5 cm (tennis ball) on a 30-kilo pig.
- The pigs must be checked daily and their condition and development of any lesions be assessed.
- It might be useful to collect these pigs in a few pens in order to make monitoring of the pigs and the development of the hernia sac easier.

Large hernias without complications and hernias with lesions: The pig must be housed in hospital pen with soft lying area and reduced stocking density (a heat source is generally not needed)

- The pig is thrifty, generally unaffected and with no reduced mobility.
- Abrasions, lesions without scab, lesions with warmth and swelling, no matter the hernia size
 - If it is assessed that the lesion cannot heal, the pig must be euthanised.
- If the hernia sac is over 15 cm (handball) on a slaughter-ready pig or over 5 cm (tennis ball) on a 30-kilo pig.
- The pigs must be checked daily and their condition and any lesions be assessed.
- **This hospital pen is NOT at the same time a hospital pen for generally affected, weak and sick pigs.**

Housing of generally affected pigs:

Pigs with hernia with complications MUST BE EUTHANISED no matter the size of the hernia sac.

- The pig is generally affected, depressed, unthrifty and e.g. a strangulated piece of the intestine or other complications is suspected.
- Reduced mobility due to the size of the hernia.
- Large lesions where it is assessed that the wound cannot heal.



With the correct housing, you increase the chance of your pigs with hernia making it to slaughter.

In Ø-Vet we have examined various hernia pens and the pigs' condition during the housing period.

All pigs were fed restrictively during the trial period.

- In pens with no special housing for hernia pigs, an improved condition was seen on 39% of the pigs.
- In pens with fine sawdust as bedding where sawdust was supplied when needed, there was an improved condition on 61% of the animals.
- In pens with straw as deep litter, an improvement in the size of the hernia sac and lesion was seen on 74% of the animals.



Lesion on hernia sac day 1



Status of the lesion 6 days later



Healed lesion on hernia sac day 28

Based on the study, we recommend straw and especially deep litter for housing of hernia pigs, but other types of soft bedding can of course also be used (see fact sheet concerning construction, equipping and use of hospital pens).

If you house pigs using a straw board, you must of course ensure that the straw board does not have any sharp edges which could damage the hernia sac and preferably avoid that the hernia sac gets dragged across the straw board when the pig moves around the pen.



Housing and handling of sows with shoulder lesions

Assessment and handling of sows with shoulder lesions

No or small shoulder lesions:

- No skin changes or skin changes and lesions that measure less than 2 cm in the widest place.
- The sow can stay in the farrowing pen.
 - Corrective measures must be started.
 - Soft floor in the farrowing pen or pads on the shoulders
 - Rubber mat*
 - Pads**, important to ensure air for the lesion and to continue checking and assessing the lesion.
 - Use of caring cream

Mild shoulder lesions:

- An approximately round lesion with well-defined edges measuring minimum 2 cm in the widest place and surrounded by a thickened edge 2 cm and which is not a severe shoulder lesion.
- The sow can stay in the farrowing pen.
 - Corrective measures must be started.
 - Soft floor in the farrowing pen or pads on the shoulders
 - Rubber mat*
 - Pads**, important to ensure air for the lesion and to continue checking and assessing the lesion.
 - Use of caring cream

Severe shoulder lesions:

- An approximately round lesion with well-defined edges measuring minimum 5 cm in the widest place and surrounded by a thickened edge
- The sow must immediately be weaned and moved to a hospital pen with soft lying area.

When weaning the sow to insemination unit

If the sow still has a mild shoulder lesion when she is due for weaning, then the sow must still have soft lying area even when housed in the insemination unit.

- A rubber mat on solid floor in the insemination unit. Can be bought in rolls and be rolled out in several pens next to each other so that sows with shoulder lesions are housed together.



- Pads on the shoulder

In case of a severe shoulder lesion, the sow must be weaned into a hospital pen with soft lying area.

Rubber mats*:

The rubber mat should be soft and yielding and be kept clean and dry. If the mat gets wet and soiled, it must be scraped clean and dry. You can choose to spread an absorbent product on the mat (straw, shavings, Stalosan etc.).

When choosing a rubber mat, we recommend rubber mats from Aalborg Gummivarefabrik who produces and sells various types of rubber mats specially developed for pigs including equipment for attaching them. Search on below page:

<https://aag.world/shop/staldprodukter-til-grise-20c1.html>

The mats are also sold by, among others, P-Lindberg

Pads**:

Pads are sold by, among others, P-Lindberg (shoulder cap where the hole should be cut larger to ensure better ventilation and ease monitoring) and can also be made as a DIY product as a cheaper solution (see photos).

Inspiration for DIY pads:



How to treat and handle pressure wounds and wounds around hoofs and dewclaws on sows

Many sows get pressure wounds and wounds especially on the hind legs around the hoofs/dewclaws during housing in the farrowing unit.

This increases the risk of infection and culling.

How and why:

- The sow is fixated and lies down a lot with her hind legs directly on the slats.
 - Both in connection with farrowing and during nursing period
- Her movements are restricted due to the farrowing rails.
 - Makes her movement pattern of getting up and lying down difficult.
- Many farrowing rails are mounted with bolts which the legs scrape against.
 - Increases the risk of injuries.
- The legs often at the same time lie directly on the faeces.
- Thereby an increased risk arises of pressure wounds, abrasions, wounds and scratches
 - Portal of entry for infection



Prevention: Intervene as soon as the first signs of injury to the area are seen (swelling, redness, wounds and scratches).

- To place a rubber mat beneath the hind legs will not have the desired effect.
 - It will become wet and soiled by urine and faeces and at the same time slippery and will therefore pose a big risk of further injury and slipping.
- Put a bell on the hind leg (known from the horse world).
 - Available in several materials, among other things rubber and neoprene.
 - Easy to use, closed with Velcro.
 - Can be taken off, washed (e.g. in washing machine) and used again.
 - Protects against wear against the slat and insulates against pressure wounds.
 - Ensures protection and at the same time air on any developing wounds.
 - Easy to check and makes it possible to treat locally.
 - Enables wound care in the form of wash/bath, use of softening, caring and disinfecting products.





Care: Once a wound has developed, healing should be helped a little:

- Wash the wound.
 - Can be done with warm water on its own, but soap water with brown soap has a good effect.
 - Make a hoof bath.
 - If the sow is in the farrowing unit, you can take a bucket/tub and put it in the pen and place the leg in it.
 - Can be made in the insemination unit in single animal stall, see photos below.
 - Sold by several wholesalers, search for hoof bath for cattle.
 - Can also be made outdoors for free-range pigs.
- Treat the wound:
 - Lanolin spray: Anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, moisturises, binds moisture.
 - Salicylic acid paste: sticky and disinfecting, thereby protecting the wound while exfoliating dead tissue without harming healthy skin.
 - Wound spray: Protective spray for restoring skin in case of scratches and small wounds.
- Protect the wound:
 - Apply a bandage and replace it regularly.
 - Put a bell on it which protects and enables daily monitoring and any necessary care.

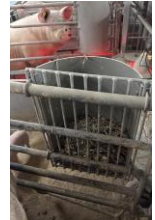


Fact sheet rooting and enrichment material

All pigs must have permanent 24/7 access to both rooting and enrichment material which is not soiled by faeces.

What is rooting and enrichment material:

- Rooting material: Fulfills the pig's need for rooting behaviour.
 - The pigs must be able to stand in its natural position and with its head turned down and root with its snout in the material.
 - Must be made of natural material which at the same time is manipulable, malleable and placed at floor level.
- Enrichment material: Satisfies the pig's need for keeping busy, i.e. examine their surroundings.
 - Pigs examine their surroundings by making rooting, sniffing, biting and chewing movements.
 - Must be made of natural material which at the same time is manipulable and malleable, but the material must **not** necessarily be given on the floor.



Materials: The following materials are considered to be natural material and at the same time manipulable and malleable:

- Straw, hay, wood (soft), sawdust, mushroom compost, peat or a mix of this, rope (sisal and hemp), jute sack, soil, compost og pectin waste.
 - Feed on the floor for piglets in the farrowing unit
 - Feed supplied in automatic feeders which must be manipulated in order to release small amounts (only rooting material).



Materials and supply of these	Rooting material	Enrichment material	Need to supplement
Deep litter	X	X	
Straw in straw rack	X	X	
Automatic supply of straw or similar material such as straw feeder.	X	X	
Manual supply of loose material on the floor e.g. straw, shavings, sphagnum, saw dust, soil, compost, wood chips or pectin waste	X	X	
Feeder with material in small pellets or cut form e.g. cut straw, straw pellets or wood pellets	X	X	
Material in pressed blocks given on the floor e.g. pressed straw, sphagnum and saw dust.	X	X	
Free-lying wood blocks/branches given on the floor e.g. "Spanish rider", wood blocks in chains or tilting device and wood blocks attached to equipment	X	X	
Holder with pressed material or wood (beam holder) touching the floor	X	X	
Rope – lying on the floor	X	X	
Dry feed in feeder	X		X
Rope – not lying on the floor		X	X
Holder with pressed natural material or wood, not touching the floor		X	X
Wood blocks/branches – not lying on the floor		X	X

Amount: How much material that must be available depends on the number of animals in the pens.

The guidelines from the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration state that as a minimum there must be:

- 1-9 pigs: One piece of material fulfilling the need for rooting and enrichment material or one piece of rooting material e.g. feed in a feeder which must be manipulated in order to release feed and one piece of enrichment material.
- 10-18 pigs: Two pieces of material fulfilling the need for rooting and enrichment material or one piece of rooting material e.g. feed in a feeder which must be manipulated in order to release feed and two pieces of enrichment material.
- Over 18 pigs: Minimum as with 10-18 pigs, preferably more.

In case of problems in the pens (tail bites, ear lesions, flank bites, fights etc.) extra material, preferably new, must be supplied to distract the pigs and preferably be replaced regularly.

