

Coccidiosis (Coccidia)

At some point every hog breeder could encounter Coccidiosis. It can come to your herd by bringing in a hog that's contaminated. Hogs over about 4 months old usually don't show symptoms but they can be carriers. Or you or visitors can bring it home by your shoes and tires just by walking or driving across a contaminated area. Truck carriers loaded with hogs may stop for gas and you could park or walk where they were. These "germs" can survive in an area for months.

Your hogs can become sick by rooting or eating in an area where this "germ" has landed from your shoes or tires. Because adult hogs can be carriers but don't show symptoms, the "germ" can be hiding in their feces and can be spread throughout the herd easily.

Coccidiosis is caused by a microscopic parasite that lives inside the cells of the intestine. In newborn litters and up to about 4 months of age it multiplies and destroys the intestine. The piglet is not able to digest properly and develops loose and watery diarrhea that's yellowish to greenish in color and maybe tinged or dark with blood. Dehydration is also a symptom. The belly may be swollen and the piglet will look wasted and not healthy, losing weight no matter how much it eats.

It's fast moving and by the time you notice there's a problem, the internal damage has been done. Many newborn piglets do not survive however the older they are, the more able they are to recover. Recovered hogs are usually not healthy for the rest of their lives. Adult hogs seem to have a resistance to developing it but they can be carriers and not show any sign.

Fecal exams don't always determine the diagnosis. Positive diagnosis is by necropsy to examine the intestines.

It's often spread from a nursing sow to her piglets. Her colostrum does not provide immunity to coccidiosis. The piglets are not able to digest because of the intestine damage

and will often die of malnutrition and dehydration. The breeder may notice problems within 3 to 5 days of infection. The disease usually lasts 7 to 10 days. Grounds, soil and bedding can be contaminated for months afterwards.

Coccidiosis is difficult to treat and highly contagious. It does not respond to parasite medications even though it's a parasite. (medications for worming, lice, ticks or mites does not work.) It also does not respond to antibiotics. There is no sure-fire treatment but there's been limited success using sulphonamides or Baycox. Working with your vet is very important. You should also clean the area of manure and bedding and burn it. Spraying the area frequently with a mixture of 50% bleach and 50% water is highly recommended.

Very young or newborn piglets will often die. Weaned growers may recover from coccidiosis but die from other infections like pneumonia that's brought on by a weakened immune system.

Adult hogs usually don't show symptoms but it can happen. There are always exceptions. Know the symptoms and be prepared.

This is a disease that moves quickly and easily. It's very serious to your herd and its future and is being seen more and more with the small breeder. Working with your vet and using good bio-security practices are important.

Coccidiosis is a disease that helped bring more hogs into confinement facilities because the concrete was easier to clean, disinfect and maintain. But the use of confinement buildings and farrowing crates has also caused the disease to become more prevalent due to concentration. Hogs traveling across the country to and from these facilities have increased Coccidiosis infection to smaller breeders because of contamination of shoes and vehicles and so forth.



This is a grower size hog that was professionally diagnosed with Coccidiosis.

The hog seemed to recover initially probably due to being older when infected, however died a couple of weeks later. Note the swollen distended belly and general appearance of not being thrifty. It was unable to overcome the damage done to the intestines so that even with a strong nutritious diet it was not able to digest well for overall good health, and may have also developed a secondary infection it was unable to fight off.



The breeder initially thought the hog had worms and treated accordingly with medications. When it did not respond to the treatments veterinary help was sought and proper diagnosis was made by laboratory exams.

Fecal exams are not always able to diagnose this. The “parasite and eggs” must be at a certain stage for a confirmed or positive diagnosis.

Positive diagnosis should be made for the sake of your herd.

Example: You can stop for gas, walking across the lot where a hog trailer was parked last month that had adult hogs infected with coccidiosis and no symptoms. Adults don't show symptoms. You come home and feed your hogs, walking where they eat, sleep and root. A month later your pregnant sow farrows and a week later all the litter is dead from severe diarrhea.

During that month before farrowing the pregnant sow eats, sleeps and poops where the rest of the herd is. Now it's possible they're all infected as carriers. Once a diagnosis is made it's very important to clean the areas. Remove manure and bedding and burn. You may also want to reschedule breeding or farrowing to allow time for all disinfectants and weather conditions to kill the germs, (parasites). You should also monitor your adults as possible carriers and be prepared when they farrow.

