

Mastitis

Mastitis is an infection of the mammary glands that can occur any time during lactation but more often begins right after farrowing or a day or two after weaning. It occurs when bacteria enters the mammary gland(s) either from environmental factors or by piglets teeth while nursing. It can affect one gland or several depending on transmission and severity.

For additional information see the TEATS chapter in the RWHA website Tutorial.

There are 3 types of bacteria that cause mastitis.

Coliform Mastitis- Indicated by reduced milk production, a sick sow and unthrifty piglets. This bacteria can spread thru the herd by the elimination of body waste and produces a contaminated environment for all.

Staphylococcal and Streptococcal Mastitis- These forms are usually less severe and is normally confined to an individual sow. The bacteria usually enters thru the skin or orifices. It may be present but dormant to only flare up when farrowing. This type is the one most breeders will see if mastitis develops.

Miscellaneous Bacteria- As the name implies there are no particular bacteria that may cause this mastitis, there are several. They are rare and can be extremely serious and possibly cause death by toxemia. These bacteria are antibiotic resistant.

Causes

Most commonly caused by poor hygiene. Can also come from contaminated drinking water. Also flare ups from dormant bacteria already in the sows system that show up during farrowing.

Signs

Not eating, lethargic. Eyes may be reddened. Temperature. Normal temperature for hogs is around 101 degrees. Teats may be swollen, reddened or discolored, painful, warm or hot to the touch, or lumpy. Sow may lay on her belly more often. There may be less milk production and piglets unable to nurse. Sow may exhibit some or all of these symptoms.

Prevention

The best prevention is to clean and disinfect living, farrowing and eating areas often. It's difficult to do or even imagine when you have hogs but there are a few things you can do.

Clean up and disinfect all areas. Remove old bedding materials and supply fresh straw. Fresh straw is preferred rather than wood chips or shavings. Keep eating, living and farrowing areas dry. Wet or moisture is a perfect living condition for germs.

You probably think this is crazy or impossible. Rain, snow, mud, dug out mud holes, spilled food, body waste. It's always horrible and impossible to clean. You can be right but there are a few things you can do. Given enough room and without overcrowding, hogs eliminate their body waste away from their living and eating areas. Body waste can be contaminated with bacteria and/or be a prime incubation and growing area for it. Give your hogs enough room even if downsizing the amount must be done. If you farrow in shelters or barns clean out old bedding and replace with fresh prior to using the area again. Keep the area dry. Small nicks and cuts from nursing piglets can be an entry point for bacteria to the nursing sow.

As always you should disinfect the eating, living or gathering areas and farrowing areas. A cheap \$5.00 gallon sprayer and a little bit of bleach and water is all it takes. 1 part bleach to 9 parts water. Spray the areas down about every 2 weeks. You don't have to make mud, a mist is fine and will only take a few minutes of your time. Spray down farrowing areas after you remove the old bedding and before you add fresh. Develop a routine. Doing this is not difficult, time consuming or expensive and could save you money, headache and heartache in the future. Spraying down with a bleach solution is recommended to help with many infections and not only to help prevent mastitis. You could be saving yourself and your herd in more ways than you think.

Treatment

Sometimes even with good prevention methods a sow may develop mastitis. It can be very serious and even cause death. Plus you'll have a litter of new piglets to raise on your own. Mastitis moves quickly so treatment should not be put off. Only treat with antibiotics if you have experience and know what you're doing. Otherwise please contact a veterinarian for medication. Normally home remedies do not work well or timely for mastitis. You need something stronger and faster acting.

The affected teat(s) probably will become damaged and may be blind for future nursing litters. Each sow can be different and it also depends on the level of infection and damage done. They may also harbor dormant bacteria, just waiting for the next farrowing so they can strike again. Be sure to complete the round of antibiotics even if the sow is feeling better.

Mastitis is not something to mess around with. Do your best to prevent it from happening but if it does, get prompt treatment. You have the sow and future litters, and you have the current litter to raise possibly on your own. It's not something you want to deal with if it can be prevented.