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Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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Swine Erysipelas

Cooperative Extension Service: South Dakota State University and U. S. Department of Agriculture
Swine Erysipelas

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Cause and Occurrence
Erysipelas in swine is caused by the bacterium Erysipelothrix insidiosa. This organism is capable of surviving for long periods in water, soil, pasture, decaying organic matter, and the carcasses of meat animals.

In swine the disease exists in a number of forms, affecting principally young swine. The organism is excreted from infected animals and survives long periods, especially in alkaline soil. The susceptible animal probably will contract the disease from the soil borne organism through defects in the skin and/or hooves. Recovered and chronically sick animals may be carriers of the infection for extended periods of time.

Symptoms
Swine affected with the acute disease may die without showing distinct clinical signs. Most often, acutely infected animals have an increased body temperature, 104°-108°F. There is evidence of joint soreness as the affected animals walk stiffly and shift weight from one foot to another when standing. They will often be observed lying on their sternums and separately rather than piling in groups.

Skin discoloration varying from red to purple discoloration of the ears, snout and abdomen is present in most cases. In some instances diamond-shaped red to purple colored lesions may be present over all areas of the body but especially on the back and flanks.

Death loss in the acute form may vary from almost no deaths to 100 percent. Infected animals which do not die, frequently are carriers and develop chronic infection of the joints, heart valves, or skin. In the acute cases, death will commonly occur between 2-4 days after the first clinical signs of illness. If the animal survives beyond this period it may recover and become a chronically infected carrier.

Diagnosis
The diagnosis of acute erysipelas depends on the proper evaluation of a good history and careful and complete clinical and post mortem examination of affected animals. Tissues from infected animals can be cultured on bacteriologic media and the causative bacteria isolated. Diagnosis of the various chronic forms of the disease may often be made on the basis of a clinical evaluation.

Control
Since it is not always possible to know if premises or other swine are infected with this organism, routine vaccination is the best means of prevention. Bacterins and low virulence, live culture immunizing strains of E. insidiosa are used extensively in South Dakota.