

# Teeth clipping piglets

Instructor check when completed

## PREPARATION

- |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Ensure that the following materials are present in the medical tray: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ A small container and antiseptic solution or surgical spirit</li><li>➤ Toothbrush</li><li>➤ Teeth clippers</li><li>➤ Wax marker</li></ul> <p><b><i>A pair of teeth clippers should be dedicated to this procedure and not used for navel shortening* or tail docking*</i></b></p> |
| 2 | Check that the clippers are sharp and hold them up to the light to ensure that the cutting edges meet. If damaged replace with a new pair                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 3 | If the clippers are not clean, scrub them with hot soapy water and place in the container with antiseptic or surgical spirit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 4 | Identify the litters to be clipped or continue from other processing procedures                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 5 | Wash hands thoroughly                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## PROCEDURE

- |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <p><i>This procedure assumes that the operator is right handed.</i></p> <p>Carefully place all piglets into the processing cart, bottomless box or creep area. <b><i>Beware of the sow!</i></b></p>   |
| 2 | Pick up the piglet in the left hand with the thumb positioned in the crease behind the pig's right ear.                                                                                               |
| 3 | Gently force the first or second finger into the mouth and to the back of the jaw to keep the mouth open and tongue held down.                                                                        |
| 4 | Position the remaining fingers under the piglets body and neck to support the piglet's weight. The second or third finger may be used to gently squeeze the windpipe to prevent the piglet squealing. |
| 5 | Tilt the piglet's head to one side depending on preference                                                                                                                                            |



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**PROCEDURE (cont'd)**

6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Place the clippers around one pair of teeth and parallel to the jaw bone</li> <li>➤ Use a quick and firm squeeze of the clippers to cut the teeth close to the gum.</li> </ul>
7	Repeat the process for the three remaining pairs of teeth taking care not to damage the gums, tongue or any part of the mouth
8	Rub a finger over the area where the teeth have been removed to ensure that no sharp edges, points or fragments remain
9	If sharp edges remain trim the teeth again with the clippers
10	Mark the piglet and return to its farrowing pen or continue with the next procedure
11	Dip the clippers in the antiseptic solution or surgical spirit and if necessary remove debris with the toothbrush
12	Repeat the process for the remaining pigs in the litter leaving any small or weak pigs to be clipped at a later date should they survive. Mark weak piglets according to the company <b><i>Pig marking protocol</i></b>
13	Note on the <b><i>Farrowing card</i></b> under <b><i>Teeth</i></b> in the <b><i>Processing</i></b> section that the litter has been clipped and make a special note of any small or weak piglets still to be clipped
14	Clean the clippers and move on to the next litter
15	Once all piglet processing procedures are completed for all litters, follow the <b><i>Cleaning the medical tray</i></b> procedure



## Note to instructor

The PPT Pig Skills Manual assumes that teeth clipping is carried out at the same time as **Care of navel cords** and ear notching\* or ear tattooing\*, 6-24 hours after the completion of farrowing. Carrying out further procedures such as iron injections\*, tail docking\* and castration\* at this time is extremely stressful to the piglet and may increase the risk of pre-weaning mortality. The PPT Skills Manual recommends that these other procedures are carried out at 3 days of age

It is advisable to allow the trainee to concentrate on one procedure at once and for the instructor to complete processing other piglets. The trainee may gradually take responsibility for more of the processing procedures when his/her competency in each procedure is proven.

## Preparation

Assist the trainee to check the medical tray for necessary equipment and identify the newly born litters requiring teeth clipping

## Equipment and facilities

- Litters born more than 6 hours previously
- A small container and antiseptic solution or surgical spirit
- Toothbrush
- Teeth clippers
- Wax marker

***A pair of teeth clippers should be dedicated to this procedure and not used for care of navels\* or tail docking\****

## Objective

To remove the canine teeth of the new-born piglet in a way that minimises the chances of infection

## Reasons

Explain to trainee:

- The canine teeth of piglets are very sharp at birth.
- They may injure the faces of other pigs during the squabble to establish “teat order” which may result in an infection such as greasy pig disease
- They may also severely scratch the teats and udder of the sow, making her very uncomfortable, restless, perhaps reluctant to suckle the litter and prone to savaging or crushing piglets



## Teeth clipping piglets

### Explain safety precautions

- **Beware of the sow** as she may become agitated as piglets are caught and placed in the processing cart, bottomless box or creep
- **Teeth fragments may fly and enter the stockperson's eye**  
It is recommended that the head is held well back during clipping or that protective goggles are worn

### Explain procedure

- Go through the procedure sheet step by step with the trainee
- Encourage questions

### Explain important points

Stress the key aspects of the procedure and explain  
Ask the trainee why he/she thinks they are important

- Timing - teeth should be clipped within 24 hours of birth but not within the first 6 hours of birth and hence before piglets have consumed sufficient colostrum
- Small and weak piglets - processing should be delayed until 3 days of age for small, weak piglets
- Hygiene - clippers must be cleaned with hot soapy water before and after use and should be stored in antiseptic or surgical spirit. They should also be dipped into the antiseptic or surgical spirit between piglets. Teeth may be broken or shattered by blunt or damaged clippers. The clippers must be sharp, in good condition and should be replaced regularly
- Minimising damage to the piglet's mouth - clippers should be held parallel to the jaw and care should be taken not to damage the gums, tongue or mouth of the piglet. Stress that poor teeth clipping technique may lead to gum infections and also increase the incidence of meningitis and joint ill
- Recording - a note should be made on the **Farrowing card** once teeth clipping has been completed. Also a note should be made of any small and weak piglets which require clipping at a later date

### Demonstrate

Show the trainee the skill step by step, explaining what is being done and following the procedures exactly. Make sure the trainee observes carefully and understands what is being done.

### Questions

Answer any questions regarding the procedure



<p><b>Trainee carry out</b></p>	<p>Allow the trainee to hold the clippers in his/her hand of preference and also allow him/her to clip teeth in the order which feels most comfortable. Ask the trainee to carry out the whole procedure, with help according to Competence level - explain what help you will give:</p>
<p><b>Level of guidance</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give detailed step by step instruction through the whole procedure</li> <li>2. Give guidance only when asked or when a problem occurs</li> <li>3. Give no guidance: Trainee to describe what he/she is doing throughout the procedure</li> </ol>
<p><b>Discuss</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Check off each stage on the procedures sheet</li> <li>➤ How did the trainee feel he/she did?</li> <li>➤ Which parts of the procedure were omitted or caused a problem?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Problem solve</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Check off each stage on the procedures sheet</li> <li>➤ How did the trainee feel he/she did?</li> <li>➤ Which parts of the procedure were omitted or caused a problem?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclude</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stress the importance of the task and using the correct procedures</li> <li>➤ Refer the trainee to the relevant part of the Trainee handbook</li> <li>➤ Thank him/her for their efforts</li> <li>➤ Sign the trainee's Achievement record</li> <li>➤ Arrange a date/time for training at the next Competence level if appropriate, or the Understanding review</li> </ul>



## Background

The four pairs of needle or canine teeth of the piglet are very sharp at birth. It is common pig husbandry practice to remove these shortly after birth, to minimise damage to the sow and other piglets.

Piglets may fight quite vigorously whilst competing for a teat and prior to a definite teat order becoming established. During this squabbling the faces of littermates may become badly marked, leaving open sites for infections such as greasy pig disease. Equally the teats and udder of the sow may become scratched and inflamed. The affected sow is uncomfortable, reluctant to suckle and becomes prone to either savaging or crushing piglets whilst attempting to avoid suckling.

Teeth clipping is however considered by some to be a mutilation and EU Welfare Regulations require that teeth should only be clipped where damage to sows and piglets is widespread and the problem cannot be resolved by other means. Cross fostered pigs will always squabble to some extent and therefore teeth clipping is an essential practice on most units where cross fostering is regularly carried out.

## Procedure

The important aspects of the procedure are as follows:

**Timing:** Teeth clipping provides a potential site of infection. The piglet which has obtained immunoglobulins from the sow via colostrum is in far better shape to face any infection. It is therefore best practice to delay teeth clipping until at least 6 hours after birth when piglets have achieved adequate intakes of colostrum. Ideally all teeth clipping will be complete 24 hours after birth. If it is delayed then more damage may result to other piglets and the sow's udder.

**Small and weak piglets:** Piglets will inevitably be slightly sore after teeth clipping. This does not pose a problem for large and strong piglets but small and weak piglets are more likely to compete for a teat and survive if teeth clipping is delayed until day 3 after birth.



## Procedure (cont'd)

**Hygiene:** A pair of clippers should be dedicated to the teeth clipping process and should not be used for navel shortening\* or tail docking\*

- Hands should be washed thoroughly before commencing teeth clipping.
- Clippers must be disinfected before and after use and this is best achieved with soap and hot water and a toothbrush. Once clean, clippers are best stored in a suitable container with antiseptic or surgical spirit and should also be dipped into this antiseptic or surgical spirit between piglets.
- Teeth may be broken or shattered by blunt or damaged clippers and resulting fragments may lead to infection. It is good practice to hold clippers up to the light prior to use to check that the cutting edges meet and replace them regularly.

**Operator safety:** The sow will become upset as piglets squeal whilst being caught or handled. Stockpersons must **beware of the sow** during the procedure and not place themselves in a position where they may be attacked.

Even small piglets may give a sharp bite and a firm grip must be established on the piglet which keeps the mouth open, tongue out of the way and exposes the canine teeth at the correct angle for clipping. The second or third fingers may be used to gently squeeze the windpipe to prevent the piglet squealing and so reduce agitation of the sow.

**Teeth fragments may fly during clipping and enter the stockperson's eye**

This problem may be avoided by holding the head well back during teeth clipping or by wearing goggles.

**Minimising damage to the piglets mouth:** There is a risk of gum infection with a procedure of this nature and poor teeth clipping technique may also increase the incidence of meningitis and joint ill. The majority of problems are avoided by using sharp and clean clippers but great care should be taken to clip teeth parallel to the jaw avoiding damage to the gum, tongue or mouth of the piglet.

**Recording:** Once all piglets suitable for teeth clipping have been processed, a note should be made on the **Farrowing card** that the litter has been clipped. A special note should also be made of any small and weak piglets which will require clipping at a later date.



Question and Answer	Check correct answers	
<b>Q: Why is teeth clipping carried out?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The sharp canine teeth may injure the faces of other pigs whilst “teat order” is being established</li> </ul>	1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They may also severely scratch the teats and udder of the sow, making her very uncomfortable, restless, perhaps reluctant to suckle the litter.</li> </ul>	2	
<b>Q: When should teeth clipping be carried out and why?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Between 6-24 hours after birth</li> </ul>	3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prior to 6 hours the piglet may not have consumed adequate colostrum and may therefore be more susceptible to infection</li> </ul>	4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The longer teeth are left intact the more damage is likely to occur to other piglets and the sow</li> </ul>	5	
<b>Q: What hygiene precautions are taken to prevent infection?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands should be washed before the operation</li> </ul>	6	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clippers must be sharp and have cutting surfaces which meet</li> </ul>	7	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clippers must be cleaned with hot soapy water before and after use and should be stored in antiseptic or surgical spirit.</li> </ul>	8	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They should also be dipped into the antiseptic or surgical spirit between piglets</li> </ul>	9	
<b>Q: What is the correct alignment for the clippers when clipping the teeth?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parallel to the gum line</li> </ul>	10	
<b>Q: What may result if teeth clipping technique is poor?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gum infections, increased risk of meningitis and joint ill</li> </ul>	11	
<b>Q: Which pigs are unsuitable for teeth clipping?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All small and weak pigs</li> </ul>	12	
<b>Q: When should small and weak pigs have their teeth clipped?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 days of age</li> </ul>	13	

Total up correct answers		
Number of correct answers required	9	
Sign trainees record of achievement		
If less than 9 correct answers, arrange date for second review		

