

Hi all,

I was just wanted to do a quick introduction as this is my first talkshop. I'm Hannah, the newest member of the pig veterinary team at GVG. I joined last September, after graduating from the University of Surrey in July 2023. I have been lucky enough to meet a large number of our clients already, both as a student and vet, and I look forward to meeting more of you in the future.

### **Electronic Medicines Book (EMB):**

Just a quick reminder to everyone that the **EMB deadline** for 2023 Q4 is on the **11<sup>th</sup> February**.

### **Managing pigs in cold weather**

As with the ever changing world that we live in the climate over the winter months is becoming both more extreme and variable, which creates the perfect conditions for disease across all areas of the pig sector.

Many factors such as age, body weight, stage of production and accommodation type affect how pigs cope with the cold.

The 'thermal neutral zone' is the temperature range in which pigs are most comfortable and use the least amount of energy to maintain their core body temperature. These ranges are bound by 'upper' and 'lower' critical temperatures, as noted in the table. The table shows that as a pigs body mass increases its lower critical temperature decreases. Therefore, older, larger and more productive pigs can better tolerate cooler temperatures compared to our smaller neonatal piglets.



Approximate guide to thermal neutral zones according to pig weight and flooring		
Weight (kg)	Straw bedding °C	Slatted flooring °C
5	27-30	30-32
10	20-24	25-28
20	15-23	19-25
30	13-23	17-25
90	11-22	15-24

If a pig is in an environment which is below its thermal neutral zone it will have to use up body reserves and feed intake to generate heat. This will therefore increase the feed conversion ratio, meaning more feed will be needed for growth. Neonatal piglets have minimal fat stores and these are used up quickly in cold conditions, hence the importance of good environmental control as well as husbandry in the early stages of a pigs life. Chilled neonatal pigs can quickly become lethargic and have decreased feed intake which in turn predisposes the piglets to a plethora of infectious diseases which further exacerbates this vicious cycle and will result in increased pre-weaning mortality.

## How can I tell if my pigs are cold?

If your pigs are showing any of the signs below it is vital to think about changes that can be made to increase the temperature of their environment.

### Conditions that can *intensify/ exacerbate* the cold:

- **Draughts** - increased air speed produces a greater chill factor
- **Wet** - damp bedding increases the rate at which a pig loses body heat
- **Minimal/ no bedding** - decreased insulation to maintain a constant temperature around the pigs
- **Large air space** - increased heat loss via convection currents and a larger area to heat up initially

### Signs that pigs are **COLD**:

- Huddling
- Shivering
- Lethargy
- Decreased feed intake
- Poor growth rates despite increased feed intake
- Increased disease incidence

### How we can keep our pigs **WARM**:

- **Monitor environment** with max/min thermometers
- Maintain a **stable building temperature** if possible
- Provide adequate, **dry and clean bedding**
- Create warmer, **sheltered areas** such as covered laying areas/ creating kennels
- Utilise **additional heat source** if appropriate, such as heat lamps
- Ensure adequate ventilation but **minimise draughts** at pig level
- **Insulate arcs** and add door flaps if possible to prevent draughts
- Move arcs to **drier areas** and closer to feed and water sources to allow for easy access
- Ensure the **diet provided meets** the everyday **energy requirements** for the stage of pigs
- Consider additional husbandry measures for accommodation where group sizes are reduced such as adding **extra bedding** into **hospital pens**

### Medicines training:

A reminder that we have the following Red Tractor approved medicines training course coming up. It is a requirement by Red Tractor Standards to have at least one member of staff with up-to-date training. Please contact the office if you would like to sign up.

- **4pm on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

**PHS up-coming dates:**

Quick reminder to all members of the GVG Pig Health Scheme if you would like your pigs assessed these are our next assessment dates at the relevant abattoirs.

**Westerleigh:** 7<sup>th</sup> February, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 30<sup>th</sup> April, 15<sup>th</sup> May and 31<sup>st</sup> May.

**Gills:** 26<sup>th</sup> February, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 4<sup>th</sup> April and 20<sup>th</sup> May.

If you have not yet joined the scheme and would like to, and market your pigs to either Westerleigh or F.A. Gill please email [PHS@georgevetgroup.co.uk](mailto:PHS@georgevetgroup.co.uk) or call the office on 01666823355.

**Hannah Gregory BVMSci MRCVS**