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Oedema disease

Oedema disease is an enterotoxaemia caused by certain strains of E. coli which colonise the pig's small intestine and produce an exotoxin which gets into the blood and damages blood vessel walls resulting in oedema.

Clinical signs

Clinical signs include swellings on the forehead, eyelids and lips. In mild cases these signs may be accompanied by pruritus (itchiness). Sometimes dyspnoea (laboured breathing) can be seen. Some animals show a watery diarrhoea containing clots of fresh blood.

In a few recovering animals a chronic form of the disease may be seen, including nervous signs, such as circling or twisting of the neck, or the atrophy of leg muscles with progressive weakness.

Post mortem findings

Pigs are usually in good condition with a variable oedema seen at specific sites. Oedema of the stomach lining is characteristically seen. This can vary from being hard to detect to a 2cm thickening of the stomach wall. Sometimes oedema of the gall bladder is seen, as is oedema of the colonic mesentery. The lungs may show varying degrees of oedema.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is based on clinical signs of neurological disease in thriving pigs one or two weeks after weaning, of which the most common is partial ataxia or a staggering gait. Subcutaneous oedema in the eyelids and on the forehead is virtually diagnostic. Diagnosis can be confirmed by post mortem examination and bacteriology, although it should be noted that negative bacteriological findings do not preclude a diagnosis of oedema disease.

Treatment

Pigs showing subcutaneous oedema, respiratory distress or an inability to rise rarely respond to treatment.

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