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Introduction

The swinepox virus belongs to the genus Suipoxvirus in the Poxviridae genus. The pig is the only known host for the swinepox virus, which has made it a suitable candidate for vector vaccine production. Morbidity can be as high as 100% but mortality never exceeds 5%. The transmission of this virus is not understood but it appears to be associated with poor hygiene and louse infestations. Vertical transmission may occur as sporadic cases of congenital infection that produce stillborn piglets with generalised lesions occur. Morbidity can be high in some herds and young pigs are the most severely affected. Mortality is low or non-existent.

The disease

The swine pox virus may infect the host pig by entering its body through an existing injury or abrasion. With the exception of moderate involvement of the superficial lymph nodes near the skin, tissues other than the skin are rarely infected. Virus can be isolated from the skin of infected animals as soon as three days post infection and a viraemia could spread the virus from its primary site of infection to secondary sites.

Clinical signs

Clinical signs are typically an eruptive dermatitis with animals most susceptible in the first 12 weeks of their lives. The skin lesions are typically seen on the flanks, belly, inner thighs and ears. Initially lesions are flat, pale, rounded areas (maculae) of 3-5mm diameter and over 48 hours these evolve into papulae which are 1-2mm high with a 10-20mm diameter. Sometimes these papulae can be confluent. Lesions shrink away a week later. Complete recovery takes about four weeks.

Diagnosis

Initial diagnosis can be made upon the observation of the pox lesions. Confirmation can be by histopathology or virus isolation. Differential diagnosis should include vesicular diseases like foot and mouth, allergic skin reactions, sunburn, bacterial dermatitis, ringworm and sarcoptic mange.

Immunity

Following infection pigs are resistant to reinfection although the mechanism that produces this immunity is not fully understood.

Treatment

No specific treatment exists.

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