



# Pighealth BYTES

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## What is disease?

Your own reference source on pig health



## Introduction

Disease is illness or, more precisely, a state of ill-being that must have a cause (aetiology) and adverse consequences. These consequences can be biological, for example, star gazing, muscular tremors or apathy, or commercial, for example, poor FCR, weight for age or depressed fertility.

Two important terms are morbidity, which is the percentage of animals affected by the disease, and mortality, which is the number of deaths in the whole group of animals or in those which are morbid.

There are other words worthy of note such as acute, which in disease terms is of relatively quick onset and short duration with obvious clinical signs; chronic is an on-going lingering disease; and peracute disease is where clinical signs are seen for a short time before death or not at all. A subclinical or subacute disease is one that is inapparent. Subclinical diseases can become clinical in nature, for example, as a consequence of animals being stressed. Clinical diseases that do not die or are not cured can progress into a chronic form.

Thus, we can have various forms of some diseases. A good example here is mastitis, for which subacute, acute and peracute forms are all known.

Two other words that cause confusion are infectious and contagious. An infectious disease is one caused by a living cause, such as a bacterium. Thus, mastitis is an infectious disease, whereas gastric torsion and biotin deficiency are both non-infectious diseases. The word contagious relates to ease of spread and a highly contagious disease is one that spreads quickly.

A disease never manifests itself in exactly the same way in every disease outbreak. That is because there are a whole lot of aggravating factors or stressors that can come into play to modify the outcome. Think of a weaner house and pneumonia. Overventilation can stress the young pigs by chilling them, whereas under ventilation can increase the airborne burden of viruses and mycoplasma thereby making the occurrence of infection and hence disease more likely. It can also increase dust levels and ammonia concentration, both of which can influence respiratory diseases. In essence, a good stockperson is someone who can identify, or better still anticipate and manage, these aggravating factors or stressors.

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