

Protecting your pig from diamond skin disease

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Everybody wants to find a diamond in the rough, but no one wants their pig to develop diamond skin disease—an infection that can cause pain and discomfort and may lead to death if left untreated.

Dr. Kevin Washburn, a professor at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, and Dr. Bridget Savitske, a veterinary resident in large animal [internal medicine](#), explain the common skin disease in pet pigs, sharing signs of disease and how to prevent infection with help from your veterinarian.

Getting to the 'root' of diamond skin disease

Diamond skin disease, also known as Erysipelas, is one of the oldest and most [common infectious diseases](#) carried in pigs. The disease gets its name from the diamond-shaped pattern that can potentially appear on the pig's skin when infected.

Diamond skin disease starts as what appears to be a minor illness and gradually gets worse with symptoms including [high fever](#), anorexia, depression, diamond-shaped lesions, and potentially death if left untreated.

"Diamond skin disease causes vasculitis, or inflammation of the blood vessels, which is the reason for the diamond-shaped pattern," Washburn said. "All the little capillary beds in the skin get clogged, and the diamonds, or blocks, on the skin are places that have lost blood flow."

While the diamond-shaped pattern is a definite sign of this disease, it is important to know that it does not always appear.

"The disease can take many forms," Savitske said. "Because it causes sepsis, the body's extreme response to infection, it has the potential to involve almost any organ system and can manifest in different ways."

While the disease is a common illness, it can be difficult to diagnose. Behavior is the most important sign for owners.

"Affected pigs will become lethargic, stop eating, and quit partaking in their normal daily activities," Washburn said. "If they are non-pigmented breeds or have white or light-colored areas, you may start to see the development of discolored [skin lesions](#)."

Washburn and Savitske advise taking your pig to a veterinarian immediately if you notice any signs of abnormal behavior.

'Sow' many reasons to vaccinate

Fortunately, diamond skin disease is easily preventable through vaccination.

"Pigs need to be vaccinated as a weanling, or as they are able to eat food other than the sow's milk, and then they need a [booster shot](#) at least three weeks later," Washburn said. "After the three-week booster, they need to get the vaccine annually."

Many times, the antibodies for diamond skin disease come in a combination vaccine, which can make vaccinating an easier task.

"There is a combination vaccine that includes [respiratory diseases](#) and reproductive tract diseases to prevent loss of pregnancy," Washburn said.

While diamond skin disease is most commonly carried by pigs, humans are also susceptible to skin infections and potentially sepsis if exposed.

If your pig has diamond skin disease, it is important to use caution; Washburn urges owners to keep their pet pigs outside of the house to avoid spreading diamond skin disease.

"Because it's spread by both [fecal matter](#) and in nasal secretions, owners should make sure they do not chew their fingernails, give the pig kisses,

or otherwise risk the bacteria getting near your face," Savitske said.

The infection occurs when a bacterium is ingested, often because of environmental contamination, and multiplies in the body.

"Pigs are typically exposed to diamond skin disease through contaminated soil," Washburn said.

Because the disease can gain access through contaminated food, water, and bedding, owners can reduce the risk of diamond skin disease by providing pigs with clean bedding, [fresh water](#), and storing food in a sanitary location to limit possible contamination.

By vaccinating your pig annually, watching for any signs of illness, and maintaining a clean environment, you can help your pet pig avoid diamond skin disease and live a longer, healthier life.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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