



What to Expect When:

Your Sow is Expecting

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Sows are pregnant for 114 days – 3 months, 3 weeks, and 3 days. Once you know that your sow is expecting, you have time to come up with a plan for farrowing and set up facilities that will keep your sow and piglets safe and warm. This article will discuss generalities regarding pregnancy and farrowing in both the domestic and pot-bellied sow.

Sows can show minimal signs of pregnancy until close to the time of farrowing. Fortunately, your veterinarian can determine if a sow is pregnant approximately 30 days after breeding. Perceptive owners may observe slight

abdominal distention as early as 80-90 days of gestation, with mammary development occurring soon thereafter. During the last week of gestation the vulva may become swollen and red, and the mammary glands will distend with colostrum 24-48 hours prior to farrowing.

Preventive care, including vaccinations and deworming, should be discussed with your veterinarian prior to farrowing. In case of emergency, organize a box of supplies. A heat lamp may be needed to add warmth to the farrowing crate. Piglets must maintain a consistent body temperature during the initial days after birth.

Farrowing supplies should be gathered. Your veterinarian can help to explain your role in the birthing process and when to call for assistance. You will need:

- Dry, clean towels
- Infant nasal bulb syringe to remove mucous from piglet's nose and mouth
- Paper towels
- Thermometer
- A heating source (heat lamp or heat pads)
- A farrowing plan in place, designed by you and your veterinarian, with plans about when to call if there is an emergency
- Dilute chlorhexidine (1:4 dilution) or tincture of iodine for dipping of umbilicus

In the final hours preceding farrowing, the sow will become restless and may build a nest if bedding material is available. The sow may frequently urinate and defecate, and an increase in respiration rate is not uncommon. In the last 15-60 minutes before the first piglet is born, the sow will cease activity and lie down on her side. Abdominal contractions will become evident, and small amounts of fluid may be expelled from the vulva. The first piglet should be born 15-20 minutes after the sow begins to strain. Piglets should continue to be born every 15-20 minutes following the first one until the sow is done. Piglets can be born head first or back legs first. The sow will usually pass placentas after the last piglet is born, but occasionally may pass a placenta in between piglets.

Dystocias are rare in the domestic sow, but pot-bellied sows may experience an increased rate of dystocia due to a narrowed birth canal and heavy body condition score. If a sow continues to labor for more than 30-45 minutes without producing a piglet, intervention is warranted. Delivery of piglets takes skilled hands. If no personnel with experience delivering piglets is available, your veterinarian should be contacted immediately to

reduce the chance of death of the sow or piglets.

Once piglets are born, they have an innate sense to quickly stand and begin moving toward the udder to nurse. Observation of each piglet nursing is advised to ensure that each piglet consumes colostrum (first milk), which contain important immunoglobulins that will give the piglets protective immunity until the time that they can be vaccinated.

If a piglet appears to be slow to rise and move toward the udder, or is having respiratory distress, the piglet will need aid. The airway can be suctioned using an infant bulb syringe, and a towel can be used to briskly rub the piglet over the back and ribcage, stimulating it to breathe. The piglet should not be swung or hung upside down in efforts to remove mucous from the airway. Once the piglet is warmed and breathing normally, the piglet can be aided with latching onto the mammary gland and nursing.

Piglets will need an extra source of heat following farrowing. They need to be kept at an environmental temperature in excess of 90°F the first couple weeks of life. If you use a heat lamp, place it where piglets can safely get under it but the sow is not in danger of burning the skin if she would brush up against it. Make sure the cords are safely tucked away so that the sow cannot chew on them. Placing the heat lamp in a protected corner allows the piglets not only a warm place to lie but allows them a safe place as well. If sows are not kept in a farrowing crate, there is increased risk of piglets being crushed as the sow lies down. By providing the warm, protected corner, the piglets are more likely to have a safe place to lie when they are not nursing.

Sows will need to continue to have free choice, clean water and high-quality nutrition following parturition, because the nursing piglets will increase the sow's nutritional requirements.