

Important update on Pseudorabies in Michigan

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Pseudorabies (PRV) is a disease affecting swine. On rare occasions after massive exposure it has also affected cattle, horses, dogs, cats, sheep, and goats. The disease is caused by a herpesvirus that has its greatest effects on pregnant sows and young pigs. Unborn pigs may be aborted or born dead. Baby pigs suffer convulsions and death. In older pigs the virus causes pneumonia which in severe cases may cause death. Many of the youngest pigs die after infection. Older pigs that survive infection become carriers of the pseudorabies virus for life. ***The virus does not cause illness in humans.***

PRV is primarily spread through direct animal-to-animal (or nose-to-nose) contact between an infected, shedding pig and a non-infected pig. ***If present on inanimate objects, such as boots, clothing, feed, trucks or equipment, the virus can also spread from herd to herd and farm to farm.*** As occasionally happened 20-30 years ago, if a large swine facility is infected and many newly infected pigs are shedding, virus can be aerosolized and carried up to 2 miles by wind to neighboring facilities.

Because of its economic and welfare impact on pigs, nearly 15 years ago the commercial industry acted to eradicate the disease. The industry followed a strict farm entry restriction, age segregation, vaccination and culling program to eliminate the virus from their herds. ***Currently, all 50 States are free of PRV in their commercial swine herds.*** Commercial herds continue to employ measures such as perimeter fencing and solid concrete walls to prevent contact with free-roaming swine of unknown health status.

Recently, pseudorabies has been found in pigs on Michigan game farms. Pigs raised on game farms tend to resemble their wild ancestors (Russian wild boars, Arkansas Razorbacks, Eurasian pigs) although they may be crosses between these and domestic pigs. Game farm pigs that escape, having been raised with minimal human care, quickly adapt to living in the wild.

Feral (wild) populations of pigs are responsible for tremendous environmental damage. Their broad dietary habits, extremely destructive behaviors, and aggression make them one of the most destructive introduced species across the globe. Wild pigs destroy native vegetation as they dig for food, travel in herds, and create wallows. They will eat native animals, such as ground nesting birds and their eggs. Wild pigs may also act as crop pests. (Nowak, 1991)

No commercial production herds have been found to be infected with PRV in the U.S. since early 2003. Sporadic infections have been found in game farms, free-ranging pigs and outdoor pigs that have come in contact with feral swine. Any infected feral pigs or outdoor herds have been promptly depopulated when found, and intense epidemiological investigations have been conducted to ascertain that no viral spread to commercial production swine has occurred.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) has identified three “game farm” herds in Central Michigan and a fourth in Northern Michigan as positive for pseudorabies. ***Currently, to the best of anyone’s knowledge, Michigan’s commercial and club pig herds remain free of the pseudorabies virus but we can not rest assured that the virus is contained on the four identified herds until MDA completes their planned testing.***

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Because of the recent finding of pseudorabies there is reason for additional bio-security:

- *MDA will be conducting surveillance PRV testing of all swine herds within 5 miles of a known PRV positive herd. If contacted by MDA, assist them with their testing process.*
- *Pay attention to fencing and protection of domestic stock. Do not allow feral pigs to have fence line contact with domestic pigs. In areas with high feral pig populations consider perimeter fencing around commercial production.*
- *Do not leave any waste feed, human food waste or trash out where it might attract free-roaming pigs*
- *Report (and shoot if you have a hunting license) any free-roaming pigs that enter your property. Contact MDA (517) 241-4694 if you shoot a free roaming pig or suspect there are feral pigs on your property. Part of the control process is to monitor feral pig movement and test all harvested feral pigs.*
- *Do not move domestic swine back and forth between farms. If the virus were to get into a domestic herd unlimited movement would increase the spread of the disease.*
- *Limit unnecessary visitors. Clothing, boots and equipment can spread the virus.*
- *Change clothes and boots after visiting a hog market or other pig farms.*
- *Keep a separate pair of boots and clothes that you wear when working with your pigs. Do not wear those clothes and boots when you leave your farm.*

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