

# Sooooooooo... You Want to Know About Pseudorabies

"Because Animal Health Matters"

5\_05

Information from the  
Texas Animal Health Commission  
2105 Kramer Lane  
Box 12966 (mailing address)  
Austin, Texas 78711-2966  
1-800-550-8242

Receive news releases automatically! Send a request to  
comments@tahc.state.tx.us or call 1-800-550-8242, ext 710.

## Pseudorabies: A Threat to Domestic Swine Herds

Pseudorabies (pronounced sue-dough-ray-beez) is a viral disease that was declared eradicated in commercial production swine herds in Fall 2004, after years of mandatory testing, depopulation of infected herds and epidemiology work. This disease designation allows commercial swine to be moved interstate with fewer testing requirements or restrictions. As the country's 13th leading producer of swine, Texas commercial swine operators can appreciate the ability to transport show pigs, breeding and feeder swine to markets, farms and slaughter plants with greater ease.

Pseudorabies remains a threat, however, because the virus circulates among feral (wild) swine roaming many states. Recognizing the disease risk posed by these feral animals, **swine herds now are classified in one of three categories:**

- 1. Commercial Production Swine:** swine continuously managed and housed to prevent exposure to transitional or feral swine...(little risk of disease introduction).
- 2. Transitional Production Swine:** swine that, because of their management or facilities, have a reasonable opportunity for exposure to free-ranging or captive feral swine... (risk of disease introduction).

**In recent years, Texas' infected domestic herds all have been related to intentional or accidental introduction of feral swine.**

- 3. Feral Swine:** swine living all or any part of their lives as free-roaming animals... (high risk).



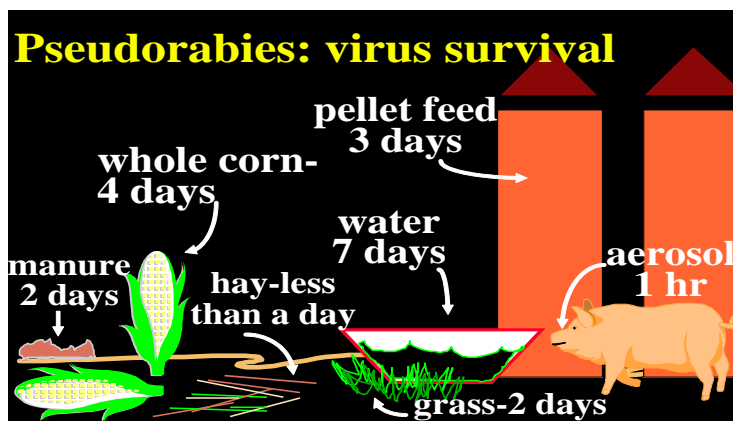
feral pig

**Nine of 40 feral swine killed in North Texas in Spring 2005 tested positive for the disease. With an estimated three million wild hogs in Texas, disease prevention depends on keeping feral swine out!**

## About the Disease

Pseudorabies was formally identified by Dr. Aladar Aujeszky in Hungary in 1902, and therefore, sometimes is referred to as "Aujeszky's disease." It is particularly important to note that pseudorabies is not known to affect humans. And, although the disease is not related to rabies; pseudorabies (meaning "false rabies") may cause some clinical signs similar to those seen in a rabid animal.

Pseudorabies can cause up to 60 percent death loss in piglets less than a month old. Within 24 to 36 hours after exposure to the virus, infected piglets may develop a high fever, respiratory distress, vomiting and convulsions. Death can occur in less than three days.



Infected sows may abort or absorb their fetuses, while older infected swine may develop short-term flu-like symptoms. Even after recovering, however, they carry the disease. This can cause another “sweep” of infection through the herd.

### How is it Spread?

Usually, pseudorabies is transmitted when an infected pig has direct or sexual contact with other swine. Feed, water, bedding and equipment can mechanically spread virus when fouled with the nasal discharge, saliva or semen of carrier or infected swine.



When the nasal discharge is aerosolized, the virus contaminates surrounding air until the droplets settle on a surface.

Widespread viral contamination enables the disease to move quickly through a herd. On occasion, pseudorabies can be passed from swine to other animals such as dogs, cattle and wild animals. These animals are called “dead-end” hosts, because they usually die from the infection, but are not thought to spread the disease.

Pseudorabies has been dubbed “Mad Itch” when it affects cattle. The suffering animals rub away their hair and hide against trees, fences or other objects, in an effort to relieve intense itching.

### Maintaining Disease Surveillance



collecting a blood sample for pseudorabies testing

Disease surveillance for pseudorabies and swine brucellosis (another disease eradication program) will continue. Blood samples are collected at the livestock market from sexually intact swine six months of age or older, unless the animals originate from a herd with a recognized disease status, or proof is provided that a negative test was obtained in the previous 30 days.

At Texas slaughter plants, samples are taken from mature sows and boars that can be traced to a herd of origin. This includes swine delivered to slaughter plants under direct consignment by the producer, or through a livestock market with back tag identification.

Blood samples are forwarded to the laboratory, operated jointly by the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Samples positive on the screening

test are forwarded to the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL), where they undergo the serum neutralization (or SN) test for confirmation.

### Record Keeping is Key

Record keeping is a vital part of disease surveillance and management. TAHC regulations require swine dealers to maintain records for at least two years on animals bought and sold, making it possible to track animal movement if disease is detected.

**Dealers are those who buy or sell swine in commerce:**

- on their own account,
- as an employee or agent of the vender, the purchaser, or both,
- on a commission basis.

While this includes slaughter plants, livestock markets and commission merchants, it exempts individuals who buy or sell swine as part of their breeding, feeding or stocker operation.

Records required include the seller's and buyer's name and address, county of origin for the swine and the number of animals bought or sold. Animals also must be described, listing sex, breed and some form of individual identification numbers.

Records at auctions and commission firms must show the delivery vehicle license number.

### What if Pseudorabies is Detected?

When infection is detected in a domestic swine herd, the animals are quarantined. The owner may choose to depopulate the herd, or have the herd undergo repeated testing and removal of infected or incubating animals until the herd is cleared of the disease.

Often, an owner may elect to depopulate (slaughter) the herd by selling them for slaughter (the meat if inspected and safe for consumption). Depopulation allows the producer to return to business quickly.

When they are available, federal funds help offset losses from depopulation.

### Ounce of Prevention--

#### Manage to Protect Swine from Pseudorabies and Swine Brucellosis

##### 1. Keep feral swine OUT.

If feral swine exposure occurs in your herd, contact your private veterinarian or the TAHC.



**2. Buy only tested animals.** This is a “given” if you purchase breeding swine six months or older at the livestock market.

If you purchase by private treaty, ask an accredited veterinarian to collect blood samples and have the tests run. Consider buying replacements and additions from herds that are tested under a routine protocol and have earned the TAHC’s pseudorabies-qualified and validated brucellosis-free statuses.

**2. Isolate newly acquired stock for 30 days.**

Keeping newly acquired animals separate from the herd for 30 days can save money in the long run. Watch for signs of illness and consider having the animals retested before commingling



them into the main herd. If the animals become ill, destroy -- or at least disinfect -- bedding, equipment, feed, water and other objects that could be contaminated.

Practice good biosecurity. Don't carry contaminated equipment or wear soiled clothing from an isolation pen to the main herd!

**3. Check with the seller before moving new stock from isolation to the main herd.** Ask if disease has been diagnosed in the herd of origin since your purchase.

**4. Weigh the risk of sharing a boar.** Having the animal tested prior to using it is cheaper than dealing with disease!

**5. Practice "all-in, all-out" with feeder pigs.**