

PCA_050 Handling of Pigs (Expiry: July 2025)

I. OBJECTIVE

To describe a standardised procedures and expectations when handling pigs for scientific purposes.

II. DEFINITIONS

Competent - “the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required regarding the care and use of animals. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply knowledge and skill to new situations and environments.” (as per, *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes*, 2013)

III. COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS

- Relative to animal ethics applications, when using this SOP, the following must be described in the individual ethics application: intended frequency of animal use, any intended variation to this procedure.
- A minimum of two people should be present whenever handling pigs.
- Do not use electric prodders and do not hit animals.
- Sows with young piglets may become aggressive: do not attempt to work with piglets while within striking range of the sow’s head, as the sow may attack in “protection” of the piglets.
- Weaner pigs startle easily: work calmly and minimise erratic/ harsh sounds and movements.
- Pigs vocalise when they are handled: although this behaviour should not be ignored, be aware this does not necessarily indicate that they are experiencing pain or distress. Competency requires that you can distinguish between normal and abnormal behaviour. Ask your supervisor for advice if you are uncertain.
- Snares: pig snares may be used in adult pigs when this restraint is considered the least invasive and “best-practice” method to affect the required procedure. Snares should not be used for prolonged periods at a time (in an individual animal), snares should not be used to move pigs (e.g. trying to pull the pig by the snare), and snares should not be tied up to fixed objects while in use.
- While working with pigs, pens and laneways should generally be kept free of obstructions.
- As per routine conditions (see document footer) this procedure must be performed by, or under the direct supervision of, personnel who are competent to perform the procedure.

IV. EQUIPMENT

- Drafting boards +/- pig paddles
- “V” shaped, pig handling trough
- Snare, of appropriate material (for example cotton or hemp rope)
- PPE, as appropriate relative to the location and procedure (Overalls, steel-capped rubber boots, ear-muffs or ear plugs, are all recommended. As required, seek advice from biosecurity personnel).

V. PROCEDURE

Moving pigs

1. When moving pigs, use drafting boards and or pig paddles to control pigs’ direction of movement (these also provide a barrier of protection for the handler). Pig boards must be held low in front of handler so pigs cannot see underneath them – this encourages pigs to move ahead. Physical pressure may be applied to the pigs with a board or paddle; however, they should not be used to hit the animals to encourage movement.

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- Any variation to this SOP must be described in the relevant animal ethics application
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The following are not acceptable means of encouraging movement: use of dogs, use of electric goads, use of hitting, kicking, or otherwise striking pigs with physical objects (including pig boards or paddles).

2. Use of verbal encouragement should be used as appropriate to help facilitate the (calm) movement.
3. Move pigs at a calm and steady pace (pigs should be walking calmly at their own pace, not running).
4. Take particular care when navigating across smooth/slippery surfaces (e.g. wet surfaces), around sharp corners, and when moving through shadows, or when transitioning from light to relatively darker areas.
5. Laneways and passages in the forward direction should be kept clear to encourage movement of the pigs.

Small pigs (<20kg)

1. Restrain by grasping a hind leg above the hock, and then lift the animal by placing your other hand underneath the piglet at the thorax to support the body as you lift.
2. Alternatively, small pigs may be caught by grasping a hind leg above the hock and raising this leg so that the piglet is standing on the other three legs. Restrain the animal by holding it under your free arm, and move your other hand under the thorax and abdomen to support the piglet's weight.
3. If the animal is too large to lift completely off the ground, restrain it by holding it under one arm and lifting the rear of the animal slightly off the ground, so that both hind feet do not have contact with the ground. At the same time, one of the forelegs, grasped at the elbow, may also be secured with your free hand.
4. If required to collect a blood sample, restrain pig on its back on a flat surface, or within a "V" shaped trough, with one person holding hind legs out straight, one person holding front legs flat towards pig's belly and another person holding the pig's head down with hand over lower jaw to hold mouth shut.

The following are not acceptable methods of picking up a small pig: grasping the ears, a front leg, or the tail.

Medium sized pigs (e.g. large weaners)

1. Standing astride the pig, with each leg positioned at the shoulders (bilaterally) the handler uses their legs to hold the pig in place. For some procedures a third person may be required: one to secure the pig, one to position it for the procedure, and one to perform the procedure (e.g. when collecting a blood sample)

Large, adult pigs

1. If appropriate for the required procedure, move the pig into handling stocks, crate, or a stall. Paddles and or a snare may then be used to safely position the animal to perform the procedure.
 - a. Application of a snare: the snare's loop must encircle the maxilla (upper jaw), caudal to the canines. The snare should be held in place relatively loosely. As the pig struggles, the snare should tighten around the animal's maxilla. The pig may tend to sit down following resistance from the snare. Snares should not be tied up to a fixed object while in use (i.e. someone should physically hold onto the snare the whole time it is in use).
2. If appropriate for the required procedure, while in a pen or laneway, boards and or a snare may be used to safely position the animal. Alternatively, and only if it is safe to do so, handlers may be able to secure an animal against a wall, or the ground, by placing their body weight (via their legs) against the fore and hind flanks of the animal.

Version #	Reviewing AEC (note: all other relevant AECs ratify the approval)	AEC Review Date	Approval To Date
2	PCA	20/07/2022	20/07/2025

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