

Blood sampling guidance for 13+ week old pigs



Figure 1. Moving and handling pigs with boards.

(Source: Dave Warren, Picture Team)

Preparation and location

Good preparation:

- Minimises short-term stress to pig and staff
- Allows good aseptic technique
- Reduces risks of bruising/hematomas and needle stick injuries

It will be necessary to use a specifically designed snare/snatch to provide adequate restraint for blood sampling a pig at 13+ weeks of age.

You will need two people:

- An experienced handler who is calm, quiet and confident at pig handling to restrain the animal
- A vet to take the blood sample

The handling area should be large enough to perform the task but small enough to restrict movement. All equipment for blood sampling should be ready and immediately available to you in this area.

The jugular is located relatively deep in the pig. You will need to use a 1.5", 18–20G needle, potentially 2" in large adult pigs.

Equipment needed:

- Ear defenders
- Snare/snatch and pig board(s)
- Storage container (for sample storage at a suitable temperature)
- Gloves/hand cleansing agent
- Surgical spirit and cotton wool ball/pads
- Needles (1.5–2" 18–20G)
- Vacutainers or syringes
- Sharps bin
- Pens (for labelling samples)
- Stock marker (for marking sampled pigs)
- First aid kit (in case needed)
- Laboratory submission form



Figure 2. Blood sampling kit

(Source: Lis King, AHDB)



Pigs make a loud noise when restrained. Protect your hearing, wear ear defenders.

Pig handling and restraint with a snare

- Move the pig in a calm, unhurried manner
- Allow the pig to always walk to its destination at its own pace
- Encourage the pig forward with a pig board and your voice

Snares should only be used by a trained and competent handler. The size of the snare loop should be relevant to the size of the pig and kept clean and hygienic.

The snare must only be used to restrain the pig, not to move the animal.

- Place the snare loop in the mouth and over the top jaw and snout of the pig
- Ensure that the loop is behind the canines
- The pig will naturally pull away from the snare
- The head can be raised to extend the neck with the snare handle held vertically in the other hand
- Keep the pigs head and spine as straight as possible for sampling



Figure 3. Restraint using a snare.

Note position of snare - as far back as possible and behind the canines.

(Source: Jesus Borobia Belsue, Mossvet Ltd)

Ensure the handler keeps the head and spine as straight as possible



Figure 4. Taking a blood sample from a pig.

Note the position of the sample site in the deepest part of the jugular groove between the angle of the jaw and the shoulder

(Source: Gemma Thwaites, Garth Pig Practice Ltd)

Blood sampling technique

- Stand or kneel alongside (or just behind) of the shoulder of the pig
- Locate the jugular groove to each side of the trachea
- Note the jugular is not visible in the pig
- Using a vacutainer or needle and syringe, advance the needle through the skin in the deepest part of the jugular groove between the angle of the jaw and the shoulder. Insert the needle at an angle perpendicular to the skin (see figure 4)
- Once through the skin, activate the vacuum or create a slight vacuum in the syringe
- Advance the needle until you puncture the vein
- If you do not hit the vein, withdraw the needle slightly (don't deactivate the vacuum) and advance again adjusting to aim to the jugular
- Once you have filled the vacutainer, release the vacuum and withdraw the needle

Release the pig as soon as possible by smoothly loosening and releasing the snare. Mark the pig with a spray marker to ensure that it is not sampled more than once. Return the pig to its pen.