

Estrus Cycle

A swine heat cycle (estrous cycle) averages 21 days (18-24 days), with the key period called estrus (standing heat), lasting 1-3 days when the sow accepts mating, signaled by a rigid "standing reflex" (lordosis) when pressure is applied to the back, along with a swollen vulva, restlessness, and mounting other pigs. The cycle has follicular and luteal phases controlled by hormones (FSH, LH, estrogen, progesterone) and is crucial for breeding, with ovulation occurring about 2-3 days after estrus begins.

Key Stages & Signs

Proestrus (Days 18-20): Follicles develop; vulva swells, becomes red and moist; restlessness, mounting, high-pitched vocalizations.

Estrus (Day 0, 1-3): The female is receptive to the boar (standing heat); vulva is red, possibly with a sticky discharge; ears are erect; she stands firm (lordosis) when pressure is applied.

Metestrus & Diestrus: Post-ovulation, progesterone rises, leading to pregnancy or regression of the cycle, ending with prostaglandin release if not pregnant, causing the cycle to restart.

Detecting Heat (Heat Checking)

Frequency: Check females at least twice daily, ideally every 12 hours, using a boar.

Method: Apply firm pressure to the female's back; if she locks into position (standing reflex), she's in heat. If she moves away, she's not ready.

Other Signs: Swollen, red vulva; vocalizing; mounting others; seeking the boar.

Cycle Variation & Management

Post-Weaning: Sows typically return to heat 3-7 days after weaning.

Hormones: FSH stimulates follicles, LH triggers ovulation, and progesterone maintains pregnancy.

Duration: Gilts often have shorter estrus (around 38 hours) than sows (around 53 hours).

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