

One Lump, or Two? Part 1

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The horrors! We wake up one morning to find a lump on our animal that wasn't there the previous day. Oh my! Lots of gloomy scenarios run through our mind. Luckily, very few of the lumps and bumps we find on our cavies are cancer; most are of a much more innocuous origin, although some ultimately have to be dealt with.

Making a list of the possible causes for the lumps begins with a social history of the animal as well as a nutritional history. The age and sex of the animal is noted, is it housed by itself or in a group, what sort of housing and bedding are used, what feeds are used and how animals are fed and watered are also of great importance. The reason for knowing the answer to these questions will become apparent as we go through possible scenarios for these lumps.

Without a doubt, the most common lump we see is the lump under the chin of our animals. The medical term for this condition is called cervical lymphadenitis and the usual causative agent is *Streptococcus zooepidemicus*. This organism is present in the nasal cavity and also in the conjunctiva of normal animals (Quesenberry 250).

Generally we see cervical lumps in young animals although it can occur at any age, and generally they are more frequent in the young boar pen, although young sows can also be found with them. Lumps tend to occur during times of stress (post-weaning, moving to a new cage or home) when resistance may be lowered. If one animal in a pen has it, it is not unusual to see multiple animals in that pen get it. It may be passed via the watering system although just as likely is the fact that the same forces which allowed one animal to contract it are present for all the animals in the pen.

When the lining of the mouth or nasopharyngeal (back of the throat) area is damaged in some manner, the bacteria gain entrance to the body and are carried to the regional lymph nodes under the chin. That is exactly what is supposed to happen. The lymph node is the first line of defense. The bacteria may gain entrance into the animal through fighting, eating hay that is of lower quality with prickly weeds in it, or rough watering tube or valve. When it ends up in the lymph node, it may result in an enlarged lymph node that may or may not be filled with a greenish tinged matter that can range in consistency from a thick fluid to almost toothpaste like consistency.

What should a person do to treat cervical lymphadenitis?

- 1) Watchful waiting. The great majority of these lumps will go away on their own, either through being reabsorbed or through actually rupturing through the skin surface and draining and healing. Not every lump is an abscess- some are just enlarged as the animal's body does what it is supposed to do.
- 2) Incision and drain. If you feel you must do something, you can cut the lump open and drain them. Wait until the lump has matured and has a "soft spot" before doing this. I generally

tranquelize the animal and do it under local anesthetic. Please don't undertake this if you feel at all confused about what to do. Better to do nothing.

- 3) Antibiotics- if you choose to use an antibiotic, it should be one that will kill the organism. Sulfa/Trimethoprim is a reasonable choice because it is well tolerated by the animal. It's effectiveness may not be as great as that of some other antibiotics', but those are generally not tolerated as well.

It used to be recommended to remove the entire affected lymph node, but in my opinion, this is unnecessary and causes much more trauma and blood loss than is reasonable, not to mention the fact that you need general anesthesia to carry it out.

It is possible for there to be greater problems associated with this condition. The pig can get a necrotizing bronchopneumonia, it can get septicemia where the bacteria has entered the bloodstream and lodges in other organ systems where it may cause an abscess. Luckily this doesn't seem to happen very often. Very occasionally, *S moniliformis* can be the causative agent, a strep that is able to infect humans (Quesenberry 250). For this reason, practice good hygiene when handling animals with lumps or any abscess for that matter, and keep out of the hands of children until the lump has gone away.

Some folks feel it is appropriate to cull animals that have cervical lymphadenitis from their herd. This has to be a personal husbandry decision. My own practice is to feed high quality foodstuffs, reduce stress as much as possible in my herd and handle the problem medically when it arises.

For the sake of completeness, let me just add these few comments. You can have cervical lymphadenitis at any age in any pig. It has been my experience however that when I see a lump under the chin or jawbone in an adult animal, I need to look for additional causes. I have had plant matter foreign bodies cause abscesses under the tongue and I have had split premolars abscess out under the mandible causing not only loss of the tooth, but severe bone infection that was untreatable. So, while this disease seems pretty straightforward, there can also be that little twist in there that jumps up to bite you.

Quesenberry, Katherine E., and Carpenter, James W. Ferrets, Rabbits and Rodents: Clinical Medicine and Surgery. St. Louis:Saunders. 2003.

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