

Dick Vet Equine Practice Fact Sheet:

The Foaling Mare

Most mares (>95%) will give birth without complication if left unattended, however some feel that this is an expensive gamble and try and be there at the time of delivery. However, this can be more difficult than expected. Mares give birth 'explosively'!!! It can all be over in fifteen minutes or so!

Preparations for Foaling

Ideally, mares should be placed in the foaling environment 2 to 3 weeks prior to her expected foaling date as any sudden changes may delay foaling.

Mares can foal in a variety of locations, depending on the weather and facilities available. Whatever the choice of foaling locations, the environment should be clean, have adequate space, and be reasonably quiet. Mares due to foal in the cooler months will require a large (14' X 14' minimum), clean foaling stall. During warm weather, many producers choose to allow their mares to foal in grassy paddocks or pastures.

The mare should be allowed ample exercise up to foaling. Stall confinement for an extended period just prior to foaling may predispose the mare to impaction colic and abnormal swelling.

Early in gestation, some mares may have had a 'Caslicks' operation to partially suture together the lips of the vulva. Mares that have a Caslicks must have the lips of the vulva opened at least 14-28 days prior to foaling!

The average gestation length (duration of pregnancy) of mares is 335 to 340 days, but can range from 320 to 370 days.

Early Signs

The classical signs of approaching parturition include udder development beginning 2 to 6 weeks before foaling, then milk let down into the teats (teat distension) 4-6 days prior to parturition. The ends of the teats become covered with a yellow 'crust' and the mare is said to be "waxing", which occurs 1-2 days before foaling. At this time, some mares will have occasional dripping or streaming of colostrum. If this streaming is continuous and significant, the colostrum should be collected and stored for possible use with the new born foal (in clean container and then freeze) .



Parturition-Stage I

Parturition is typically broken down into three stages. Stage I, normally lasting 1 to 4 hours, reflects the initial uterine contractions and final positioning of the foal for delivery. Typically the mare will exhibit the following behaviour:

Restlessness, Pawing the bedding or ground, Getting up and down frequently, Sweating in the flanks, Urinating frequently.

During stage 1, the mare can be prepared for foaling, if desired. This could include washing the mare's vulva and udder with warm water and wrapping her tail with a clean bandage.



Parturition-Stage II

This is when the foal actually appears. If foaling is proceeding normally, the mare should be left to do it on her own. What is normal? This second stage, hard labour and foal delivery is usually completed in 10 to 30 minutes. Stage II ends following birth when the umbilical cord is broken as the mare stands or foal struggles. To avoid infection, dip the stump of the umbilical cord in Iodine solution or Chlorhexidine solution. We have a prepared solution for you so just come in and pick some up. Repeat the process several times during the first few days of life. This will help prevent bacteria invading the body via the navel stump (navel-ill), which can lead to serious complications, such as neonatal septicaemia and septic arthritis.

Parturition-Stage III

The final stage of parturition, Stage III, is the delivery of the placenta (afterbirth). These membranes, which surround the foal during gestation, should be expelled **3 to 4 hours** after delivery. Once expelled, the placenta should be examined to determine if it is intact or if any portions may have been detached. Placenta retention can be a problem, leading to uterine infection and/or laminitis (founder). If your mare has not expelled her placenta by around 5-6 hours then call your vet. After foaling, the foal should stand and nurse within 2 hours. Colostrum intake is very important and it is essential that the foal drinks at least 1-2 litres of milk in the first 8 hours of life. If the foal has had a few drinks and then lays down with a full tummy then you know he is fine.

Time After Birth	Foal's Coordination
Within minutes	Foal should right it self and sit up on chest.
15min-1 hour	Tries to stand
1-2 hours	Standing and starting to suck
Within 4 hours	Passed meconium
Within 8 hours	Had multiple good feeds of milk
Within 24 hours	Checked over by vet

Remember

We like to check foals and the mares placenta the next morning. So keep all the membranes to show the vet.

Dick Vet Equine Practice
Normal opening hours are:
Monday to Friday 8.30am-5pm
During these times please phone:
0131 445 4468
At all other times please phone:
01223 849 835

