

# Pregnancy and Foaling

## General Information

In the early months of pregnancy, a mare requires only routine care. During the late stages of pregnancy, however, certain procedures should be followed.

### Care of the Mare During Pregnancy

During the last month of pregnancy, the following considerations are important:

\_\_\_Mares confined to a stall or another small area should be regularly given the opportunity for moderate exercise.

\_\_\_Feed the mare a complete balanced ration. Additional nutrition is necessary in the last several months of pregnancy and should include a commercially available Mare and Foal feed or alfalfa hay.

\_\_\_Be sure your mare is up to date on immunizations recommended for your area. All mares should receive rhinopneumonitis vaccine at 5, 7, and 9 months of gestation. Booster immunizations during the last 2 months pregnancy also increase the level of antibodies in the mare's colostrums.

\_\_\_In conjunction with the regular deworming program, pregnant mares should be dewormed approximately 30 days before their due date and 24 hrs after foaling.

The last 2 items above can be done during the same veterinary appointment.

### Foaling

- The foal area should be quiet, with only 1 or 2 people and no other animals in attendance.
- Signs of parturition (foaling) vary greatly. Watch for a tight udder, "wax" on the teats, dripping of milk, a relaxed vulva and pelvic ligaments (softening and hollowing of the area around the tailhead), extreme nervousness and sweating.
- When the first stage of labor begins (indicated by nervousness, sweating, getting up and down, etc.), you can apply a tail bandage, but be diligent to remove this bandage after foaling. Second-stage labor is indicated by rupture of the placental membranes ("breaking water"). Once the water breaks and the amnion (whitish translucent foal sac) appears, foaling usually proceeds reasonably fast. If a "red bag presents instead of the white amnion, this is the placenta and this is an emergency situation. Call us immediately and you will be told what to do.
- Protrusion through the vulva of one front foot, then the other front foot shortly followed by the nose indicates that the foal is in the proper position and should

have little trouble being born. The shoulders are the widest point and some large foals may need gentle assistance to help them deliver without additional stress to mare and foal. Delivery should take only a few minutes or up to half an hour. Any other presentation of the foal could indicate problems. Any delay in delivery of the foal usually results in a dead or debilitated foal or can also be fatal to the mare.

- Call immediately if you suspect any problems before or during delivery.

### Immediately after foaling

- As soon as the foal is passed, clean the foal's mouth and nostrils of any mucus and/or foreign material, and observe for normal breathing.
- After delivery, encourage the mare to lie quietly for a few minutes so that all the remaining blood in the placenta has been transferred to the foal. The umbilical cord normally ruptures spontaneously when the mare gets up or when the foal struggles to get up. If it does not rupture prior to expulsion of the placenta, the chord needs to be tied and cut.
- After the umbilical cord ruptures, string can be used to tie up the amnion (foal sac) at the mare's vulva, to keep the mare from stepping on it, and to add weight to aid expulsion of the placenta. The placenta is usually expelled within a few minutes or up to 3 hours after delivery of the foal. If it does not pass after 3 hrs call us right away to assist. **NEVER pull or tug at the placenta while it is attached to the mare!** After it is passed, the placenta should be collected and kept away from dogs and direct sunlight until it can be examined thoroughly.
- Dip the stump of the foal's umbilical cord into disinfectant like iodine or chlorhexidine in a small jar or apply it to the stump with a swab. Disinfectant should be applied several times in the first 12 hours.

### Care of Newborn foals

- The foal should stand within 1 hour after birth. During this time, the mare's licking and the foal's struggling to rise stimulate the foal's neuromuscular system.
- Observe the foal for a proper sucking reflex. If the foal has not nursed after 2 hours, you may have to provide assistance. Maiden mares may need to be held so that they will not move away or kick the foal during its attempts to nurse. Keep all human intervention to the absolute minimum to facilitate bonding of the mare and foal.
- The foal should have passed the meconium (brown to green-colored first manure) soon after nursing. If you observe the foal straining, an enema may be required.
- A blood sample should be collected 18 hours after nursing to check the foal's antibody levels. A plasma transfusion may be necessary if the foal's antibody levels are abnormally low.

## **Later foal care**

- Antibodies in the mare's colostrums (first milk) provide immunity for the foal during the first 2 months of life. After this time, immunization should begin using the vaccines recommended for our area.
- Begin a regular deworming program at 2 months using a mild dewormer like pyrantel.
- Though the foal will become interested in the mare's feed and start nibbling at it after only 3 days of life, the foal's sole source of nutrition is milk for the first 2-3 months. After 6-8 weeks you may start providing solid food. Begin a supplemental feeding program at that time. Creep feeders can be used, or the mare and foal can be separated at feeding time to encourage the foal to eat. By weaning time, the foal should be healthy and eating well, and should be ready for independence.

## **Call Our Office If:**

- You have any questions concerning care of foals or pregnant mares or would like additional reading material.
- You observe any abnormalities during your mare's pregnancy.
- You observe any abnormalities in the mare during or after foaling.
- Your foal is not on its feet within 1 hour after birth and/or is not nursing within 2 hours and/ or the placenta has not been delivered within 3 hrs from birth.
- You wish to discuss your foal's immunization and deworming program.