



Equine Veterinary Services

A Guide to Foaling Your Mare

This guide is intended to be of assistance to anyone involved with the foaling of mares, but in particular we recommend it for those people who are foaling mares for the first time. It will enable you to be better prepared, know what to expect and when, and to understand the circumstances in which you may need to seek further advice or assistance. It is important to remember that 95% of foalings are uneventful and result in a healthy mare and foal, but if you are in any doubt about the way things are progressing please always phone us.

Prior to foaling

Every mare should receive a tetanus and strangles booster vaccination four to six weeks prior to the expected foaling date. This will increase their circulating antibodies and provide early protection to the foals.

If the mare has had a Caslick's operation the vulva must be opened prior to foaling to prevent it from tearing.

The mare's udder should start to swell prior to foaling. Most mares will develop small lumps of wax on the tips of their teats in the last couple of days. This is a good indication of impending foaling.

If the mare runs milk down her legs a few days before foaling you must advise the vet as she may be losing colostrum which the foal needs because it is rich in antibodies. In this instance the vet will usually do an IGG test on the foal after 24 hours to see if it has received adequate protection from its first feed. If the foal fails this test it can receive an infusion of protective plasma.

Make sure you have prepared a foaling plan by this time.



Waxed teats

Foaling

Where possible foaling should be observed. It is important to remember that the majority of foaling will take place at night and the whole process is very quick for the mare, much faster than for cattle as a rule. The use of a foal alarm is generally better than three hourly observations. The foal alarm is attached to the head collar and when the mare lies down it goes off.

The early signs of labour include stretching, looking back at the sides, sweating and circling, as well as lying down. These signs can look similar to colic.

The next sign is when the waters break, in other words the placenta tears and the fluids around the foal are expelled. The mares tail and vulva will become very wet.



The white sack

An open white sack

The legs and nose

The mare generally lies down at this stage and then starts pushing violently. In a normal foaling one leg followed by another will appear at the vulva covered in a white sack. One leg is generally in front of the other by 10 to 15 cm. The nose generally appears level with the knees and then the mare pushes out the head and neck. She will continue pushing until the chest and abdomen appear, and then it is normal for her to stop pushing with the hind legs still in the vagina.

The foal will generally shake its head at this time, and it is important to help remove the white sack from its head and nostrils, if they are not already clear. Do not try and pull out the foal or dry it straight away. Shortly after the birth the mare will stand up and start licking the foal. This is an important time for the mare to bond with the foal and they should not be disturbed for at least 20–30 minutes. Make a note of the exact time of the birth.

A normal foal should breathe straight away, and be sitting up on his chest with in 5 minutes. If you are worried you can help stimulate his breathing by tickling his nose and rubbing his chest with a towel.

Potential problems

If when the mare lies down and starts pushing a large red bag with a thick wall appears, you have a potentially life threatening situation for the foal. This is caused by premature separation of the placenta with failure of the placenta to tear, and you need to immediately cut through the red bag to allow the fluids to escape, and then get the foal out as quickly as possible. In this circumstance you should always phone us. These foals often suffer from lack of oxygen and need to be assisted to breathe.



Large red bag

Another abnormal presentation occurs when the foal's legs present with the soles of the feet facing upwards towards the tail. The most common cause of this is that the foal is upside down in the uterus. This normally corrects itself if the mare is made to stand up and walk for ten minutes. Rarely this presentation occurs when the foal is being delivered back feet first. If the head is not present and you can feel the hocks please phone us for further advice on how to proceed.

Other potential problems include a situation where one leg, or one leg and the head only are presented. If this happens you will need veterinary assistance as soon as possible.

If the mare has been pushing strongly for more than thirty minutes with nothing appearing you also need to phone us.

After Care for Mare and Foal



Foal with legs still in the vagina

The placenta of the mare should be tied up so that the mare does not step on it. Normally the mare will pass it with in two hours. If she has not it is important that you phone us for further advice.

Once the placenta has been passed it is important to check it and make sure that there are no pieces missing, especially the tips of each horn.

Any placenta retained in the uterus can cause an endometritis and subsequent laminitis which can be life threatening. If you are in any



Foal suckling

We recommend that immediately after the birth you dip the foals cord/navel in a cup of chlorhexidine (or iodine) to protect it against infections.

You should then continue to observe the mare and foal until you are sure that the foal has sucked well from the mare. This usually takes place with in two hours.

If this does not happen you should try and collect about 400mls of colostrum by milking the mare and then bottle feed the foal.



Mare with placenta tied up

doubt please phone us.

We recommend that all foals should be given an enema with in two hours so that they can easily pass the meconium (hard dry stool that builds up in the rectum while the foal is in the uterus). We advise the use of a soft tipped catheter to administer 40 to 60 mls of glycerine.

Your Check list for foaling

Halter for mare, tail wrap, scissors , torch, chlorhexidine cup to dip navel, towels, glycerine enema, baby bottle and lambs teat and your mobile phone (just in case!)

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