
Congratulations, You're Expecting!



Gestation:

The normal gestation period for the mare is around 340 days, but they can foal 2-3 weeks on either side of this date. As such mares should be watched closely after 320 days for any physical changes and odd behaviour that may indicate foaling or complications.

Helpful Tip

Preparing a foaling kit at least 2 weeks prior to the due date is strongly recommended so that you are prepared. Some ideas for your kit are as follows:

- Tail wrap
- A small bucket for warm water
- A bottle of Hibiscrub to clean the mare's vulva post-foaling, and to disinfect your hands and arms afterwards
- A couple clean face cloths
- Iodine spray to put on the umbilical stump
- An enema to give to foal after birth if needed to help to get rid of the meconium (first stool)
- Clean towels to dry off the foal
- Scissors to cut placenta in case of emergency

Signs that your mare is preparing to foal:

Watch for development of the mammary glands (warm, and increased in size). However some mares will bag up weeks prior to delivery and others will wait until the last minute.

The pelvic ligaments will also relax. This results in softness around the base of the tail and elongation of the vulva.

6-48 hours prior to foaling mares will often develop a waxy substance on the ends of their teats.

Mares that are close to foaling will typically go off feed. They may become restless and excitable. This can result in loose or decreased amounts of manure within 24 hours prior to foaling.

Unfortunately maiden mares often show minimal signs prior to foaling, so be sure to be extra observant to notice any changes.



Mare with full udder and wax present on teats.

Preparation

- When foaling is imminent, mares should be kept in a well-bedded stall. Their tails should be kept braided and wrapped so the hair is out of the way during delivery.
- Most mares will foal at night (10:00 PM – 6:00 AM) as this is the time when their environment is the most quiet.
- Unfortunately this may mean setting up cameras or sleeping in the barn for a couple of nights as it is important that you try to be present for the foaling.
- Your foaling kit should be complete and stored somewhere it will be easy to access.

Foaling- It's Happening!

There are three separate stages of foaling. It is important to understand what is going on in each of them so you can identify when something is not normal.



Stage One:

Stage one is when the uterus begins contracting to reposition the foal. Dilation of the cervix begins. During this phase, mares often go off feed and act a bit colicky. This can last for 30 min to 6 hours; the average is about 2 hours.

Stage Two:

Stage two begins with the rupture of the placental membranes, also known as the water breaking as it is typically associated with a rush of fluid. Stage two will also encompass the delivery of the foal.

In mares, this stage is extremely fast, taking only 5-30 min. This is why it is important to watch the mare closely while she is foaling. Things happen rapidly and there is not a lot of time to correct problems if they do arise. If at any point you don't think the mare is progressing as she should be, please phone your veterinarian immediately.

The first thing you typically see at the vulva after the water breaks is a grey sac. This is called the amniotic sac. Foals are often fully delivered inside of this sac, however if it ruptures this is not a problem.

After the appearance of the amniotic sac, the foal should be present at the vulvar lips within 3-4 minutes. The first part of the foal you should see is a front foot. This is followed by the second front foot and a nose.

During this stage the mare is lying on her side, with each contraction the foal should advance through the vulva. If the foal does not present in this manner or contractions are not advancing the foal forwards, please phone immediately.

Mare with amniotic sac present at the vulva



Mare down on her side with foal's front feet and a nose present at the vulva.

Often after the delivery of the front half of the foal, the mare will stop and rest, occasionally with the foal's hind legs in the vagina. This is considered normal.

Typically the foal's first movements will break its umbilical cord and promote the delivery of the hind limbs. Within minutes, the foal should be sitting on its chest and should get to its feet within 2 hours.

Stage Three:

Stage three is the delivery of the placenta. This should occur within three hours of the birth of the foal. If it does not, this is a serious complication and your veterinarian should be phoned.

If possible, gather the placenta out of the stall and store it somewhere safe. The vet will likely want to have a look at it.

While she is passing the placenta, the mare may display signs of abdominal discomfort.

Complications

Now that you are familiar with what a normal foaling should look like, it will be easier to determine if things start to go wrong. If you suspect any of these conditions are occurring, please phone immediately.

Placenta Previa:

This is commonly known as a red bag delivery, and is a common complication in miniature mares, so be sure you are familiar with the differences between this and a normal foaling. A red bag delivery occurs when the placenta detaches from the walls of the uterus prematurely. In a red bag delivery, a red velvety sac will be presented at the vulva as opposed to the normal thin grey sac. Functionally, this means that the foal's oxygen supply has been cut off. As such, acting quickly is extremely important.



As soon as you recognise this complication, phone the veterinarian, but you will likely be instructed to tear the placenta and deliver the foal on your own as the foal will not survive long enough for the veterinarian to arrive.

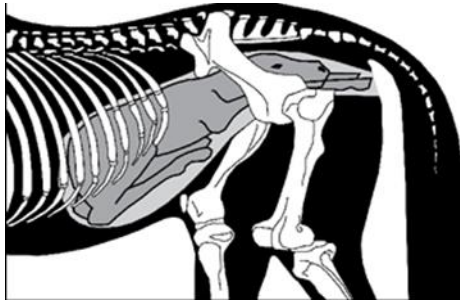


Malpresentation of the Foal: This is the other most common problem with delivery in horses. It is important for the foal to be correctly aligned. Any deviation will result in the mare being unable to deliver the foal on her own.

Prolonged delivery can result in death of the foal, so any malpresentation should be identified and corrected as quickly as possible.

Signs of a malpresentation include:

- The mare having contractions, but not making any progress.
- Presentation of only a single foot
- Presentation of a head, but no feet
- Presentation of feet, but no head
- Feet with soles turned up towards the mare's tail instead of down towards the mare's hocks.

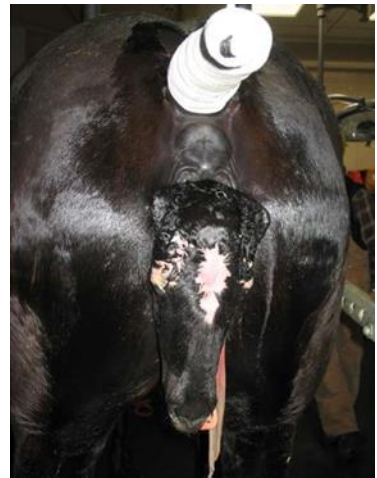


This is the normal positioning of the foal

Normal positioning should result in a foaling that looks something similar to this with front feet and head visible.



If you see anything like the following images please phone 705-722-3232



Your Foal is here! Now what?

When your foal arrives, it is important to have towels on standby to dry the foal off. By drying the foal, you help keep it warm and help regulate its body temperature. The stimulation of rubbing the towel over the foal also helps increase circulation; however, if the mare gets to her feet and begins cleaning the foal, allow her some time to do this as it is an important bonding period.

Once the foal or mare move, the umbilical cord usually breaks. The normal breaking point is about an inch below the foal's belly. If it doesn't break right away, don't panic. Eventually the mare will stand up and the tension will cause it to break. Do not break the umbilical cord yourself, as you are likely to cause excessive bleeding. The umbilical cord can act as a site of infection so it is important to treat the umbilical cord "stump" as soon as possible with dilute iodine spray.



Getting adequate colostrum within 3-4 hours of birth is vital for a foal to be healthy. Colostrum is how foals get antibodies to protect them in their first weeks of life. They can only absorb these antibodies over the first 12 hours of life so it is extremely important that they stand and nurse. Watch the foal closely as they may nose the udder, but not actually latch on and drink. They should latch to the teat and stand there sucking for about thirty seconds at a time. Foals may have colostrum over their muzzle, but none should be running from their nose.

Your mare and foal should be examined by a veterinarian within the first 24 hours after delivery to ensure that everything is going well.

What About the Mare?

Mares have varied behaviour after foaling. Some may lie and rest quietly for a while; others may jump to their feet and begin to clean the foal. All mares should display some interest in the foal, and they should not be aggressive towards the foal. Many maiden mares may be protective of their foal and try and keep people away, so be careful when approaching for the first time. Mares should stand and allow the foal to nurse. The udder may be full and sore, but the mare should not kick out at the foal or move away.

After foaling, it is normal for the mare to lie down and have additional contractions. This is needed to pass the placenta. During this time, the mare may appear colicky, but they should not be so painful that they are ignoring the foal.

If you have any questions prior to or during foaling, please do not hesitate to phone us at Central Ontario Veterinary Services. We can always be reached at 705-722-3232. After hours, please listen to the message and then select 1 for emergencies. You will be put through the veterinarian on call.