

The One-Two-Three's of Foaling

Most mares can deliver their foal without assistance, however, because time is critical in the foaling process, preparation is key to a positive outcome. Being present for observation of foaling is recommended so if problems arise you can call for help.

Gestation and Expected Delivery Date

The gestation period for a mare is roughly 11 months. If your mare was bred without the assistance of a veterinarian and has not been checked for a viable pregnancy then it is recommended to schedule this check with your vet before spending many nights in the barn waiting for your mare to deliver. Pregnancy can be detected via rectal ultrasound at 14 days post ovulation and a heartbeat can be seen as early as 25 days into gestation. If these checks were not performed then a rectal exam with or without an ultrasound can be done anytime to determine if she is pregnant, but the delivery date is not as predictable. Approximately one month to one week before foaling, the mare's udder will start to fill and the musculature on her hind end and vulva will start to "relax" or soften. She will develop "wax" on her teats which are plugs of milk. Milk calcium tests are available. However, experience has found these test kits unreliable.

The Three Stages of Parturition (Delivery)

1. Stage one involves the onset of labor until full dilation of the cervix.
2. Stage two begins when the foal is completely delivered.
3. Stage three begins immediately following the foaling and ends with delivery of the placenta.

Stage one is the longest of parturition and is often quite subtle. Often mares will continue to eat and have normal behavior but may have

subtle signs similar to colic; looking at belly, stomping feet, swishing tail, etc. They will often pass small frequent piles of manure and frequently urinate.

Stage two is the shortest stage of labor and lasts only 20-30 minutes. Normal presentation is with front feet first (often one foot behind the other followed by the head). This stage involves active labor and the mare will lie down and have strong contractions until the foal is safely delivered. After delivery of the foal, she will often remain laying with the hind limbs still in the birth canal and rest until the foal begins moving. She will then stand and start cleaning and bonding with the foal.

Stage three involves passing the placenta and can take up to 3 hours although it is often shorter. Never pull on the placenta as you can damage the uterus. Tie the placenta up with baling twine so the mare does not step on it but otherwise wait for the mare to deliver it on her own.

Post Parturition Guidelines: The 1-2-3 Rule

The foal should stand within *one* hour of delivery, nurse within *two* hours, and the placenta should pass within *three* hours. If there are any delays, a call to your veterinarian is crucial, as this is a critical time for the mare and foal. If the foal does not consume colostrum (the first milk) within 8 hours of birth, he is susceptible to illness.

Foal, Mare, and Placenta Check

If the mare and foal appear healthy and the foal has been standing and nursing, call your veterinarian to let her know that you have a new foal! She will want to arrive between 12 and 24 hours of delivery to test the foal's blood for passive transfer of the antibodies from the colostrum

(IgG test). A full exam should be done to look for problems such as angular limb deformities, swollen joints, a cleft palate, as well as abnormal heart or lung sounds. The umbilicus should be dipped in either a diluted chlorhexidine or iodine solution. It is also important to have the placenta fully evaluated for any missing pieces. Keep the placenta in a covered bucket or trash bag out of the sun until your veterinarian arrives. The vet should check the mare for any signs of trauma. Now is also a good time to discuss plans to rebreed the mare as well as schedule a vaccine program for the foal.

Contact Brandon Equine Medical Center at 813-643-7177 or email info@brandonequine.com with any questions regarding this topic.

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