

Foaling Emergencies... What to look for

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Fortunately, mares can deliver foals without assistance and without complication the majority of the time. However, complicated deliveries can happen and it is critical the foal be delivered quickly. Be prepared and prevent long-term negative effects or even death by knowing the signs of complications. If you are lucky enough to be present for this exciting event you may be able to save a life. Please refer to last month's "One – Two – Three's of Foaling" for guidelines of normal foaling. In this article, I'll cover some of the more common foaling emergencies, but you should always call your veterinarian to get advice or emergency treatment specific to your current situation if needed.

Positioning

The foal should present with its front feet (one slightly in front of the other) followed by the head. Any other positioning is abnormal and a successful delivery may require assistance and manipulation of the foal. If you see the mare's rectum bulging, then the foal's feet are directed too far dorsal (toward the back) and need to be pushed back and redirected through the vulva otherwise they can cause a rectal tear. Some mares can still deliver a foal with abnormal positioning, but keep in mind the rule of delivering in 30 minutes or less, and be ready to assist.

Red Bag

If you see a red velvety structure bulging from the vulva, this is an extreme emergency and you should call your veterinarian immediately. The placenta has started to separate from the uterine wall before the foal is delivered and the foal can quickly suffocate and die. The placenta structure should be cut open right away using scissors or a sharp knife which your veterinarian may instruct you to do. Once you cut this open and see the anionic sac (white,

shiny and translucent), you should grab the foal's feet and get the foal out as quickly as possible. A foal in this situation has likely suffered from oxygen deprivation and your veterinarian should evaluate the mare and foal immediately.

Mare Fatigue

If the foal is large and the mare is having a hard time pushing on her own, she may need assistance. She may become fatigued and stop pushing. In many cases, giving some traction on the foal's front legs intermittently will stimulate her to start having contractions again. If the foal has died, she may stop having contractions and need to be "jump started" with a dose of oxytocin. Call your veterinarian in this circumstance.

Remember, the foal should get up within an hour...

If he or she does not stand within an hour then you should call your veterinarian for advice or assistance. Healthy foals nurse within two hours of delivery and usually can find the udder quickly. If the foal starts trying to nurse on the mare's elbow, the stifle, or the stall paneling, they need some direction and may need veterinary attention right away.

Failure of Passive Transfer

There are three reasons for failure of passive transfer: 1) the mare has poor colostrum 2) the foal did not receive the colostrum in the appropriate amount of time 3) the foal did not properly absorb the nutrients. This is easily tested using an IgG snap test on site. Once diagnosed, it is recommended to give the foal a plasma transfer. Foals get the majority of their immunity from the mare's colostrum in the first 12-24 hours and is also the most likely time for them to contract infection or disease.

Tips before the big night

Have your veterinarian's number on hand.

Have a clock or watch handy so you can accurately time the sequence of events.

Have a large, clean stall prepared with straw bedding.

Have the trailer hooked up in case of emergency.

Have your first aid kit stocked and handy (towels, flashlight, scissors, knife, baling twine, exam gloves, chlorhexidine or povidone iodine solution (1% iodine)).

Remember to call your veterinarian right away if there is any question or concern that a problem is arising or if you are unsure of what to do next. We would much rather help you through a minor question and save a life than find out later things didn't go smoothly when we could have helped.

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

This article originally appeared in Horse & Pony magazine in February 2013 and is reprinted with their permission.