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## Equine Foaling

**Foaling is a very important time in a mare (and foals!) life therefore as owners it is important to have knowledge of the foaling process. This will allow you to identify problems and know when to call for help, as during the parturition (foaling) process time really is of the essence.**

The gestation period (duration of pregnancy) can vary between mares ranging between 338-365 days from last being bred. Although there is great variation between individual mares; each mare tends to have her own fairly consistent time of gestation.

### **Pre Foaling:**

During the time leading up to foaling mares should be vaccinated and wormed. Your vet will be able to advise you on the best products to use and the exact timing. It is important that the mare is receiving adequate nutrition but is not overweight during late pregnancy. She should be moved to a clean, safe environment where she can be monitored closely. There are several methods to predict the exact timing of parturition. Some common findings when foaling is imminent include:

- ‘Bagging up’ (the udder increases in size)
- ‘Waxing’ (A waxy material forms at the end of the teats)
- The ligaments around the hindquarters relax and the vulval lips may swell.

For more accurate prediction of the onset of foaling your vet can analyze electrolyte changes within the milk, or a foaling alarm may be used. The alarms vary considerably in cost and type. Some detect when the mare lays down, and some when the vulval lips start to open however these are not failsafe and nothing can replace regular checking of the mare. Two things to watch out for during late gestation include running of milk as this may mean the mares lose colostrum, which is important for the foals immunity; or vaginal discharge, which may indicate an infection of the placenta.

### **The 3 stage foaling process:**

#### **STAGE 1** (The onset of labor)

The mare may appear restless, lay down and get up frequently, urinate often or start to sweat. During this stage the foal is being moved up into the birth canal. This stage may last between 1-2 hours and fetal membranes may start to exit the vulva at the end of this stage,

#### **STAGE 2** (The birth of the foal)

The mare may continue to appear uncomfortable and reposition herself. The foal should be born in a ‘superman’ position, with both front legs extended, one slightly in front of the other, and then the head, nose first. This phase should take approximately 10-20 minutes.

#### **STAGE 3** (The passing of the placenta)

This is often overlooked but this is a vital part of the foaling process. The placenta should be kept so that a vet can ensure the entire structure was passed. Remaining tags or retained placenta can have serious, even fatal consequences for the mare.

### **Post foaling**

Mares usually foal unassisted, often when alone or at night. If parturition appears to be occurring normally it is best not to intervene. Once the foal is on the ground the umbilicus should break and any mucus or debris should be cleared from around the nostrils and mouth. The umbilicus should be disinfected with a product obtained from your vet. Immediately after birth the foal should be breathing, and soon after should start to move around. The foal should be standing within 1 hour of birth and nursing (sucking from the teat) within 2 hours. Note should be taken that the foal passes the 'meconium' (the first black, tarry faeces).

### **When to call the vet during foaling:**

- If stage 1 is taking longer than 2 hours and is not progressing
- If stage 2 takes any longer than 30 minutes
- If the foal is coming in an abnormal position (e.g tail first, soles of hooves facing up).
- If the foal is not standing within 1 hour, and nursing within 2 hours
- If the placenta has not been passed within 3 hours

**Ideally every foal should be examined at 12-18 hours post birth by a vet.**