



Mare & Foal

Gestation and stages of labour:

The normal gestation period ranges from roughly 320 to 360 days. We advise that the mare be vaccinated against influenza and tetanus with an additional booster one month before foaling. Vaccination against Equine Herpes Virus is also advised at 5, 7 and 9 months of pregnancy.

As the mare approaches her due date, the udder may enlarge and begin to leak colostrum/milk, which can dry over the teats. This process is known as “waxing up”. Her pelvic ligaments and musculature may also relax at this point and the vulva may appear to be elongated. In horses, there are three stages of labour (otherwise known as parturition):



- 1) Foetal positioning and onset of uterine contractions - this usually lasts for a few hours. The mare will be restless, may sweat, pace and raise her tail.
- 2) Foaling - this stage is fairly rapid and begins with the “breaking of the waters” and strong uterine contractions will then begin. The foal should present with its forelimbs and nose first and will be delivered within 20-40 minutes of the onset of stage two.
- 3) Expulsion of the placenta - the placenta, or “afterbirth”, should be delivered within three hours of the foal being born. If the placenta is not delivered, this is known as “retained foetal membranes” and is a veterinary emergency as it can pose life-threatening complications for the mare. Please save the placenta in a bucket for the vet to examine and ensure it is complete.

Newborn Foal:

When the foal is born, the mare should usually begin licking it and bonding with it within minutes. Ensure that the foal’s nose and mouth are clear of any membranes. The umbilicus should tear of its own accord once the mare moves - all you need to do is spray it with some iodine or alcohol spray.

A healthy newborn should be strong, responsive and fairly active. It should stand within roughly one hour of birth and begin suckling within two hours. The first faeces (meconium - often thick, dark and smelly!) should be passed within 3-4 hours after birth. Normal foals should suckle every 30-45 minutes for the first few weeks after birth.

The first milk is called colostrum and this contains antibodies which are essential for the foal’s immune system. It is crucial that the foal suckles within two hours of birth and continues to suckle frequently to ensure adequate colostrum intake. The foal cannot absorb colostrum after the first 6-12 hours, so the initial nursing period is very important. We can test for adequate colostrum intake via a blood test, which is usually taken 18-24 hours after birth. This test is called an IgG test and we recommend it for all newborn foals.

Once the foal is born, we recommend a visit and examination by a vet within the first 24 hours to ensure the foal and mare are both healthy, to check the placenta and to take bloods for IgG.

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When to call the vet:

- ◇ Foaling is taking longer than expected (mare has been in stage 2 for longer than 30 minutes)
- ◇ Foal is non-responsive
- ◇ Foal has not stood up within 1 hour
- ◇ Foal has not suckled within 2 hours
- ◇ Placenta has not been passed within 3 hours
- ◇ Mare is unable to stand after foaling
- ◇ Mare appears dull, lethargic, off feed or not herself after foaling
- ◇ Mare is bleeding heavily after foaling
- ◇ Mare appears to be afraid of the foal, is being aggressive to the foal, not allowing it to suckle
- ◇ **Assuming all is well, call us to arrange a visit for within 18-24 hours after birth so we can examine the mare, foal and placenta and take bloods for IgG if you wish.**

Afterwards:

Once the IgG bloods have returned (assuming all is normal), the mare and foal can go out in a field (preferably a clean, dry one) and the foal can get used to stretching his or her legs!

The mare may require additional feeding during the latter stages of pregnancy and during lactation, though this is very mare-dependent and not all mares will require extra nutrition. Please feel free to call us for advice about your particular mare.

The foal should not be weaned at fewer than 4 months. The ideal weaning period is between 6-12 months after birth, though this is also foal and mare dependent.

The foal should be microchipped within 6 months of birth. Please call us to arrange this. Influenza and tetanus vaccinations can also be given from 6 months of age.

Worm egg counts can be performed on both the mare and foal and we recommend these be done every 8-12 weeks.

If you have any questions please feel free to call us on 0151 794 6199.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL THE EQUINE PRACTICE, OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE