

March 2022 Equine Newsletter — Foaling

It is that wonderful time of year again where foals are starting to be born. It is absolutely magical but it can also be devastating if something goes wrong so it is important to be prepared before your foal arrives.



How long are mares in foal for and does it matter if they are early or late?

On average mares are in foal for 11 months. Jennys (female donkeys) can be in foal for up to 14 months whereas pony mares are often in foal for up to 12 months. There aren't the same risks associated with horses going over their normal gestation period as there are with humans so, it is very rare to induce a mare (unless she is critically ill, or there is something wrong with the pregnancy). If your mare is overdue, it might be sensible to have her checked over so always worth calling the vets

to discuss things. The majority of the foal's growth occurs in the last 3 months, this includes maturation of their lungs, as a result foals born prematurely often require intensive care and may unfortunately not survive. Any foal born before 320 days is classed as premature.

Is the mare at higher risk of issues during the delivery if the stallion was significantly bigger?

Studies performed using embryo transfer, show this doesn't seem to be the case. Foals from bigger sires grow faster once they born, rather than in utero. However mares can still produce very large foals if overfed during their pregnancy and some mares produce larger foals than others. If you have any questions on this please speak to our vets.

When do mares foal?

The majority of mares foal during the night but not all do, so it is important to keep an eye on mares close to foaling throughout the day and night. Foaling cameras can be particularly useful as most mares will wait to foal when they aren't being disturbed.

Can you do caesareans in horses?

Horses have to undergo general anaesthetic for caesareans so although they are performed, they are limited to emergencies. If you have a mare due to foal and would consider a referral for a caesarean if needed, then it is important to have potential transport plans already in place.

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What are the stages of foaling?

There are three stages to foaling.

The **first stage** is the mare's contractions starting and finishing with her membranes rupturing. This stage can last several hours. During which time the mare is likely to look colicky and may get up and down.

The **second stage** is the delivery of the foal which should occur within half an hour of the mare lying down and pushing. If this seems to be taking a long time (more than 30 minutes) the foal isn't appearing with two front hooves and a nose, there is substantial bleeding, or the mare is appearing exhausted, it is important to call a vet **straight away**.

The **final stage** is the delivery of the mare's placenta. This should occur within a few hours of the foal's birth. If it isn't all delivered then the mare can become incredibly sick so it is important to keep your vet updated and that the placenta is thoroughly examined post foaling.

What is a red bag delivery?

A red bag delivery is when the placenta doesn't break and so the foal starts being delivered, still within the structure. This is very dangerous for the foal as it means the foal can't breathe yet, but is no longer being supported by the mare. It is essential to break open the placenta as quickly as possible in this instance.



When should I call a vet?

Whenever you are worried! The majority of foaling's go well without any intervention, but time is of the essence in those cases that do need a hand. We are available 24/7 and very happy to advise over the phone if a visit isn't needed.

How soon should a foal be up and suckling?

A healthy foal should stand within 1 hour, suckle within 2 and pass their meconium within 3 hours.

When should a foal be checked by a vet?

If there are any concerns with mare or foal they should be checked as soon as possible. If all appears well with the foal and mum, it is still important to check that the foal has received sufficient colostrum as the mare's antibodies don't cross the placenta, the colostrum is the only way of the foal gaining immunity early on. This is done with a simple blood test. It is generally done at about 24 hours old. We always love to talk about foals so please call us to discuss even if you feel everything is going well.