

Foaling Mares

As a new year begins, one of the things that we begin to prepare for is new life. One of the first new lives we are blessed with are foals. As amazing as it is to watch a mare foal, there are several things that must happen in a given time period for it to be successful. The following is a brief review of foaling and a time line in which events must take place.

The birthing process is divided into 3 stages of labor:

First Stage: This stage is characterized by relaxation of the cervix and the beginning of uterine contractions. You may observe a mare being restless, sweating, or having signs of colic. The normal length of this stage is 1-4 hours.

Second Stage: Stage 2 is initiated by rupture of the chorioallantois and release of the watery fluid. Abdominal straining begins with this stage. Many mares will lay down at this time as well. Delivery in mares is rapid and mares will normally be exhausted and remain lying down for up to 30 minutes after the foal is out. On average Stage 2 is 20 minutes however it can last up to 40.

Third Stage: Expulsion of the fetal membranes is the final stage. The placenta ruptures at the cervical star. When expelled the placenta will invert so that the fetal side is outermost and the maternal side is innermost. This should occur within 3 hours.

There is no need to intervene in the normal birthing process but two indications for intervention are: normal time for any stage is exceeded or the mare's efforts diminish. On average foals only survive in the mare 30-40 minutes after onset of second stage labor. It is also very difficult to save a mare that has been in labor for more than 12-24 hours.

Key Points to Remember:

- Normal gestation is 322-345 days. A foal less than 320 days is premature.
- Colostrum is very important in having a healthy foal. A foal should consume 6-10 pints in the first 24 hours.
- A good rule of thumb is the foal should be standing in 1 hour, nursing in 2 hours, and the placenta passed in 3 hours.
- A retained placenta is much more serious in a mare than a cow. A placenta that is retained up to 4 hours requires medical treatment. A retained placenta puts the mare at risk of endotoxemia and laminitis.
- A well vaccinated (Sleeping Sickness, Tetanus, West Nile, Flu/Rhino, and Rabies), dewormed, and good body conditioned mare will greatly aid in the foals survivability.