

Swiftsure Equine Veterinary Services

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Preparing For Foaling

The average length of pregnancy in a mare is 338 to 343 days, but normal gestation can range from 320 to 370 days. That means that the mare will need to be closely observed daily, sometimes for several weeks, in order to help ensure the delivery of a healthy foal.

Listed below are the four most obvious and reliable signs that your mare is preparing to give birth. Please keep in mind that these signs will vary from mare to mare and some signs may not occur at all.

- ✓ Filling of the udder which often presents 2 to 4 weeks prior to foaling
- ✓ Distension of the teats 1 to 2 weeks prior to foaling
- ✓ Waxing of the teats 1 to 4 days prior to foaling
- ✓ Dripping of milk within 24 hours prior to foaling
 - If the mare is streaming significant quantities of milk, please contact your veterinarian

Listed below are four more subtle signs that your mare is preparing to give birth. These usually occur within 48 hours preceding foaling:

- ✓ Softening and flattening of the muscles in the croup
- ✓ Relaxation of the vulva
- ✓ Visible changes in the position of the foal in the mare's abdomen
- ✓ Mares may stop eating and act visibly irritated or colicky

There are 3 stages of labour and delivery:

Stage 1 - Onset of Contractions

- ✓ Contractions last 1-2 hours
- ✓ The mare may appear colicky or restless
- ✓ The sac breaks, signaled by a rush of fluid and the end of Stage 1

Stage 2 - Expulsion of the Foal

- ✓ Within 15 minutes of the rush of fluid, you should start to see the 2 front feet, 1 front foot in front of the other
- ✓ If there is no sign of the foal within the first 15 minutes, call your veterinarian **IMMEDIATELY**
- ✓ If both feet are coming out evenly, 1 leg needs to be pulled forward. Pull whichever leg comes easiest

- ✓ After the 2 front feet, you should see the nose. Some people like to break the sac open over the nostrils, but it is not necessary until the foal reaches the ground. Usually by that point the sac has already broken
- ✓ The entire foaling process should take less than 30 minutes and with every push there should be progress
- ✓ If there is no progress in delivery of the foal or delivery is lasting longer than 30 minutes, call your veterinarian IMMEDIATELY
- ✓ If at any time during Stage 2 you see RED/MAROON membranes covering the foal as it emerges from the vulva, the PLACENTA/MEMBRANES MUST BE RAPIDLY TORN OPEN
- ✓ It is not often the foal needs to be pulled out, but if you are directed to do so, you want to pull the foal downwards in a semi circle towards the mare's hocks or hind feet, not directly away from her

Stage 3 - Passage of the Placenta

- ✓ Passage of the placenta should occur 1-3 hours after the foal is delivered
- ✓ If the membranes have not passed within 6 hours, call your veterinarian IMMEDIATELY
- ✓ While the membranes are being passed, they can be tied to the mare's tail to prevent her from stepping on them and tearing them
- ✓ DO NOT cut the membranes or attempt to pull them out yourself
- ✓ Once the placenta has been passed, store it in a cool place in a clean bucket for examination by your veterinarian

Once the foal is born there are four things monitor:

- ✓ Foal should be trying to stand within 1 hour
- ✓ Foal should be trying to nurse within 2 hours. Watch that the foal is latching on and swallowing
- ✓ Foal should be actively nursing within 3-4 hours and passing meconium shortly after its first meal
- ✓ Foal should have several substantial sized meals within 6 hours

The mare and foal should be examined by a veterinarian 12 to 24hrs after birth to ensure any problems are caught and treated immediately. Normal foal behaviour consists of the repetition of nursing, being very active, urinating and resting. You must not wait until the foal is starting to act ill before contacting your veterinarian.