

FOALING DOWN THE PREGNANT MARE

What are my options for foaling down my pregnant mare?

Different situations suit different clients, and our staff and vets may be able to give you the best thoughts on where your mare may be best to foal down.

We strongly recommend that mares are monitored whilst they give birth (whether in person or remotely via a camera), to prevent any problems arising, and get an early warning if anything is going wrong. There is no right or wrong, and different situations carry different implications/costs/logistical considerations. The following is hopefully helpful information whether you decide to foal your mare at home or send her to stud. There are many aids on the market that can help pinpoint more precisely when the mare is likely to foal.

FOALING AT HOME

Many people decide to foal their mares at home, wanting to enjoy the experience, and being happy to sit up with them.

What do I need to know if I am planning to foal my mare down at home?

- BE PREPARED!
- better to have more information than less
- videos on youtube of the movements of a foal as the mare is giving birth
- Worth having a 'foaling kit' ready

PRE-WARNING SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

Temperature- the mare's temperature increases just before she is due to give birth

Lying Down- these alarms are triggered when the mare lies down, but normally the mare takes that position when she is painful a few days before having a foal.

FOALING AT A STUD

Some people prefer to send their mares to stud to foal down, knowing that experienced eyes and hands will look after their mare whilst she gives birth.

If you are looking at places to foal your mare down, it is worth talking to the staff who will be present, visiting the facilities, and ensuring you understand their pricing structure.

Some studs will require pre-entry health tests before you are able to take your mare there.

TEST KITS

FoalWatch Test kits- these measure the level of calcium in the milk secretions of the mare. The level changes drastically within the last 24-72hrs prior to foaling. They tend to be less accurate with maiden mares and in some cases, but are a useful and cost effective indicator, and help narrow down the window necessary for overnight monitoring of the mare.

ALARMS

Stitch-in- these are sutured into the vulva of the mare by a vet, and are triggered when the waters break and the foal starts to push through the lips of the vulva.

They are comparatively expensive- at about £1500 to buy, and £200 per stitch in unit.

CCTV CAMERAS

Always useful to keep an eye on the mare- and remotely can help to allow mares to settle better with no distractions. Digital cameras with a link to a mobile phone are much cheaper than previously and easier to install.

Some studs do hire out their alarms once they have finished their breeding season- worth speaking to your local stud to see if they offer this service.

NB All of these aids are useful, but NONE of them are infallible and all of them can fail! Nothing beats close visual observation and on site monitoring.

What changes may occur in late pregnancy?

Behavioral – the mare attitude will change as her body prepares for foaling

Conformational– the body shape of the mare will begin to change to accommodate the growing foal and prepare for birth

What are the changes that occur within the last month prior to foaling?

Look out for any of the following (may be only some)

- slackening of the ligaments around the tail
- increase in size of udder
- belly appears to 'drop' and form a more triangular shape
- slackening of vulva

What are the changes that occur in the last 24-72hrs before foaling?

- udder produces sticky yellow/white substance called colostrum
- mare becomes increasingly uncomfortable and painful.
- the mare may 'wax up'- and have small waxy hard drops on her teats

What are the different stages of labor?

The knowledge of the duration of each stage is very important to avoid any complications or to know when we have to call a vet.

STAGE ONE This stage starts with the uterine contractions pushing the allanto-chorion through the cervix. Some behavioral changes will be observed, the mare will walk more than normal, with uncomfortable expression and she will be sweaty. First stage ends with rupture of the membranes and release of the allantoic fluid.

STAGE TWO After rupture of the allanto-chorion you should see a white bag and the front legs of the foal within 5 minutes. To accommodate the foal, the mare will stand and lie down and may roll during this stage. This stage only lasts 20-30 minutes.

STAGE THREE Expulsion of the fetal membranes (placenta) constitutes the last stage, could take until four hours to detach the placenta. It is very important check the placenta to avoid future problems.

When do I need to get involved? KNOW YOUR PARAMETERS!

ONCE WATERS BREAK- FOAL OUT IN 20MINS

TIME TO SITTING UPRIGHT (IN STERNAL)- IMMEDIATE

TIME TO STAND- 1HOUR

TIME TO SUCK- 2HRS

TIME TO LOSS OF PLACENTA- 4HRS

What will the mare do immediately the foal has been born?

- Neighing and whickering to the foal
- Licking the foal
- Being careful not to stand on the foal
- Encouraging it to stand and suck
- May stay lying down for a bit

What should I do immediately the foal has been born?

- ensure membranes are not blocking foals nose
- eliminate the fluid inside the nose to improve breathing

- do not cut or break chord- foal receives last shunt of blood from mother
- once cord broken, treat stump with iodine solution
- give foal enema

What should I do the following day after the foal has been born?

- ask vet to take a blood sample to check immunity levels (IgG) is high enough
- ask for tetanus-antitoxin to be given
- if foal well and healthy and weather appropriate, allow time outside.

My mare is a maiden mare. Does this change anything?

The behavior will be different if the mare is maiden or if she already had a foal before. The maidens are more complicated because everything is new to them, you can move the foal front of her to help the recognition and you have to see her behavior. With an experienced mare it is all easier because she recognizes the foal immediately and start to lick it and stimulate it.

The possibilities of getting sore is greater in the maidens, but it can happen in both.

How do I know if something is going wrong?

- appearance of red membranes at vulva- RED BAG. Often abortion type situation. Call vet immediately. Important to try to assist exit of foal as soon as possible. The red appearance shows that the placenta is detaching from the uterus, and hence the foal is not getting any oxygen
- mare is in continued pain/distress for long period of time- non progression of birth can suggest that the foal is not in the correct position and hence birthing process is unable to continue
- wrong parts of foal seen first
- birth process stops at any stage
- mare not attempting to push
- placenta is not expelled from mare within 4 hours
- foal does not try to right itself quickly
- foal shows signs of prematurity, dysmaturity, is not responding to normal stimuli
- foal does not try to stand, or stand within correct time
- foal does not suck, or try to suck

IF AT ALL CONCERNED, CALL YOUR VET!

My mare is not letting the foal suck. What can I do?

One possibility is that the mare is sore due to the udder being hard and full, you can help the foal by holding the mare, giving her some anti-inflammatory or sedating her.

My mare has been running milk for days before finally foaling. Do I need to worry?

If that happened, your foal will not receive colostrum, therefore it will be necessary to give a colostrum of good quality in the first 6 to 8 hours, you could also give hyperimmune plasma after 12 hours of being born.

My mare is extremely uncomfortable post-foaling. What should I do?

Call your vet and tell them what is going on. The first step would be give some anti-inflammatory and wait for any positive change, but is very important that the vet be there to examine the mare and diagnose the problem.

What are the common things that can go wrong?

MALPRESENTATION/MALPOSTURE
COLIC
TORN BROAD LIGAMENT
RETENTION OF PLACENTA