

TWINS ~ Understanding and accepting the risks

Mares have a twin pregnancy rate of between 3 and 30% depending on the breed of the horse. A commonly accepted rate in Thoroughbred mares is approximately 15%. Identical twins are extremely rare and twins usually occur from two separate ovulations. This can either happen at the same time or a few days apart.

Why are twins a risk?

Twins are the most common cause of abortion in mares. The majority of mares will abort within 6 weeks of pregnancy but those who go on past 40 days usually abort later on, around 8 months of pregnancy.

The equine foetus requires the whole of the uterine surface to be able to provide sufficient nutrients and oxygen. If the uterus is occupied by more than one foetus then they are not receiving the correct nutritional content. In the few cases of twins that reach full term they are often smaller, more susceptible to infection and slower to develop and may need extensive nursing in the early stages of life that can be financially expensive.

Mares that are allowed to carry twin pregnancies are likely to suffer complications. They frequently abort twins or if they give birth to live twins the mares are more likely to suffer dystocia (foaling difficulties), retained foetal membranes and decreased live foaling rates in the following season.

What can be done if twins are scanned?

Due to these factors, it is commonly accepted practice to identify twins by ultrasonography and manually ablate one by rectal palpation and manipulation during the mobility phase of the pregnancy (up to 16 days). This procedure has a high success rate but occasionally can result in the loss of both embryos.

There is some evidence reported in the veterinary scientific literature to indicate that this manual ablation procedure is associated with a lower live foaling rate when performed on older mares compared to the general population of mares; however it is generally accepted that the benefits of the procedure outweigh the potential disadvantages. Equibreed veterinarians are aware of the risks of this procedure and act to manage these risks as far as is practically possible.

Undetected twins

For a variety of reasons, including asynchronous double ovulations, mobility of the embryonic vesicles, the presence of cysts in the uterus, variations in anatomy and limitations of the facilities and technology, it is not always possible to detect twins or multiple pregnancies.

Preventative approaches

Equibreed veterinarians are aware of the possibility of twin conceptions and they take all reasonable steps to fully examine the reproductive tract of the mare for twins at each examination.

As a result, it is not possible to give guarantees that a particular mare is not carrying twins. We strongly recommend that mares are checked at 14, 24, and 42 days of gestation to ensure that twins are not present

By engaging our services you agree to our general terms and conditions and therefore understand and accept the above risks associated with the procedures.

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