

# General Information on Mares and Foals



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## I. General Mare Information

### A. Gestation Length ~340 days (range 305 - 400)

1. Winter/spring pregnancy tends to be longer
2. Colts tend to be 2 - 3 days later than fillies
3. Increasing artificial light shortens gestation length
4. There are few complications of health or delivery of a foal in an overdue mare
5. It is a good idea to have an ultrasound done 14-16 days after breeding to check for twins in horses, 20-21 days for miniature horses. Ultrasound may be repeated at 30 days, 60 days, and in the 5<sup>th</sup> month to confirm pregnancy.

### B. External Signs of Preparation

1. Development of functional lactation - great variation
  - Udder begins to fill ~ 1 month prior to foaling with the greatest change noticeable 2 weeks prior to foaling.
  - Teats become distended 24 - 48 hours prior to foaling - Some mares may drip days or weeks prior to foaling - **collect colostrum and freeze it!**
  - **"Waxing"** ~24 hours prior to foaling - thick white sticky substance hanging from teat
  - Udder secretions turn from thick amber syrup, to watery grayish-white liquid, to thick white liquid
  - Maiden mares may have little if any change in udder appearance
2. Tail head begins to relax 3 - 7 days prior to foaling
3. Foal activity may increase ~ 7 days prior to delivery

### C. Stages of Parturition (foaling)

1. *Stage I - Uterine contractions begin and foal is positioned*
  - a. Lasts from hours to days
  - b. Signs of mild colic - mild sweating, pawing, poor appetite, laying down often, frequent defecation, yawning
  - c. Foal moves from laying upside down to right side up
  - d. Cervix dilates
  - e. Foal and afterbirth begin to pass through cervix
  - f. Might be delayed for hours or days if mare is distracted
2. *Stage II - Delivery of the foal*
  - a. Lasts from 5 - 30 minutes - Very quick! **Longer than 30 minutes without delivery or 15 minutes with no progress is an emergency!**
  - b. Water breaks
  - c. Amnion ("baby sack") appears - Amnion is bluish-white.
  - d. **A dark red sack presenting first is an emergency!**
  - e. Mare repositions frequently
  - f. 3 - 4 contractions in a row with 2 - 3 minute rests
  - g. One front leg precedes the other by 4 - 6 inches
  - h. The mare will strain until the foal is out past its hip
  - i. Mares will normally lay quiet for 10 - 15 minutes with the foal's rear legs still inside the mare

3. *Stage III- Extraction of the placenta*
  - a. Placenta passes within 3 hours
  - b. Save the placenta to examine for tears!

#### **D. the 1, 2, 3's of Post-Foaling Progress**

1. The foal should be up within 1 hour.  
Foals are clumsy, but resilient
2. The foal should nurse within 2 hours. It may be for less than 1 minute - foals will nurse for a short time (~1 minute) and frequently (average 7 times per hour)
3. The placenta should pass without assistance within 3 hours

## II. Preparing the mare for foaling

### **A. Vaccinations and De-worming**

1. Vaccines: Protect the mare and improve the quality of the colostrum
  - a. Rhino abortion vaccine at **5, 7, and 9 months of gestation**
  - b. Rhino, Influenza, Sleeping Sickness, Tetanus, West Nile, and Strangles **30 days prior to foaling.**
2. De-worming: Use an ivermectin or moxidectin de-wormer **1 -2 weeks prior to foaling**

### **B. Feeding and Nutrition - general guidelines**

1. Mares will require 1 ½ - 2 times more energy during pregnancy
2. 16 - 20 pounds grass/alfalfa mix hay plus 2 - 4 pounds grain
3. Balanced vitamin/mineral supplement in small doses - LMF, NW, TDI 10 - reduces foal illness and developmental orthopedic disease and makes breeding the mare easier
4. Thin mares have weaker foals. Obese mares actually milk less and have more foaling complications. Condition score 6/10 might be best.
5. Exercise regularly (light walk/trot) until 6 months of gestation and supply room to exercise after that.

### **C. Prepare for Foaling - Very Subjective!**

1. Wrap or braid tail from base to end of bone - Vet Rap, Glad Wrap and tape.  
Do not wrap to tight; it is easy to cut off circulation to the end of the tail.
2. Gently clean udder and perineal area with warm water +/- soap  
May do this for several days prior to foaling to get mare used to the foal nursing
3. Monitor during the night according to breeding date, waxing, restlessness, and tail head relaxing. Look for wax, restlessness, mild colic, poor appetite - more than 70% of foals are born between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.
4. Handle the mare as little as possible, to not prolong the first stage of labor
5. We recommend either a 12' x 24' stall with clean straw or a grass pasture
  - Easier to monitor, assist, and keep clean in stall
  - May be cleaner and less stressful in clean pasture
  - Most mares will foal outside if given a pasture with shed
  - Mares may become "cast" in a stall
6. Be able to handle your mare comfortably with a halter and lead, and be able to handle the mare's udder.

#### **D. During Labor - Very Subjective!**

1. Put yourself in her place - We recommend observation quietly at a distance.
2. Mares don't like to be interrupted - Resist helping unless you suspect there is a problem.
3. Delivery happens very quickly, although it may seem like hours - Mares foal within 20 minutes of active labor.
4. Longer than 30 minutes without delivery or 15 minutes with no progress is an emergency!
5. Call 966-5442 if you are concerned. False alarms are much better than belated emergencies.
6. Normal progress is:
  - +/- white sack,
  - one front foot,
  - the second front foot 4 - 6" behind the other,
  - baby nose!
  - head, neck, ...

#### **E. After labor ... these are only recommendations, not laws**

1. Be quiet while the foal and mare are laying down.
2. If the amnion is near the foal's nose, remove it.
3. Drench the umbilical cord with a mild anti-septic like
4. Nolvasan (chlorhexidine) or betadine solution immediately after the cord is broken.
5. Avoid cutting or tying the cord. Repeat drench after the foal has nursed.
6. When the mare gets up, tie the afterbirth in a knot to avoid excessive contamination.
7. It is best to give the mare and foal plenty of room and quiet time alone. While you may be very excited about the new baby, their bond in the first few hours of life is very important for the foal's health.
8. Foals nurse sooner and bond with the mare much better if they are not handled or minimally handled immediately after the foaling process.
9. Avoid helping the foal up or help it nurse unless you have experience doing so. Give them time to do it themselves.
10. A phosphate enema may be given to the foal after it has nursed.
11. Remember the 1,2,3 's of foaling:
  - a. Up within 1 hour
  - b. Nursing within 2 hours
  - c. Placenta passed within 3 hours
12. We recommend every newborn be examined at ~ 18- 24 hours of age to check antibody levels due to colostrum intake. We also like to check the foal to prevent any potential problems that can be remedied early on in life.

