

When preparing for the arrival of a foal, it is important to understand the basics of foaling and foal care in order to prevent disease and increase the chance of having a healthy foal. Prior to foaling, the mare should be carefully monitored for any changes in the udder and vulva. If discharge from the vulva or milking dripping from the teats is seen, the mare should be examined by your veterinarian. Discharge from the vulva may indicate inflammation of the placenta (placentitis). Premature udder development or milk dripping from the teats may be signs that there is a problem with either the foal or the placenta.

Gestation time for mares is usually 338-343 days but can range between 320-380 days. The mare may become anxious, restless, and seem to be acting colicky immediately before foaling. Normal foaling should take 20-30 minutes after the fetal membranes (allantois) seen at the mare's vulva ruptures and fluid is released. Your veterinarian should be contacted immediately if the foal has not been delivered in 20-30 minutes after the membranes break. Once the foal is on the ground, make sure the foal is breathing normally. The foal should be able to sit on its sternum 2-3 minutes after birth and stand within 1 hour of birth. If the foal is not nursing within 2 hours after birth or if the placenta has not been passed within 3 hours after birth, your veterinarian should be contacted immediately.

If the umbilical cord is still intact after delivery of the foal, it usually will break when the mare or the foal stands. If the umbilical cord must be broken manually, it should be held about 1 inch from the foal's abdomen, twisted and pulled apart. This will allow the umbilical vessels to close and will reduce the

chance of hemorrhage. The umbilical cord should never be cut with scissors! The umbilicus can be dipped in a dilute Betadine solution (tea-colored) or solution of Chlorohexidine (1 part Chlorohexidine to 4 parts saline). Dip the umbilicus 2 times per day for the first 2 days after delivery. The umbilicus should be monitored carefully for any signs of swelling, pus, bleeding, or urine. If any of these signs are seen, contact your veterinarian. The foal should pass meconium (the first dark, tarry stool) within 12 hours of birth. If this is not seen, an enema may be necessary, again, contact your veterinarian.

Colostrum, the mare's first milk, is high in antibodies and provides the foal with immunity to help prevent disease. The foal should receive colostrum within 8-12 hours of birth. At 18-24 hours old, your veterinarian should take blood to measure the IgG levels in the foal's blood to be sure the foal has received adequate colostrum. If the levels are too low, the foal is diagnosed with "failure of passive transfer". If the foal is older than 24 hours old, the foal will need intravenous plasma in order to get the immunoglobulins needed to prevent disease.

A newborn foal and the mare should always have a physical examination performed by a veterinarian within the 12-24 hours after birth. The placenta should be saved in order for your veterinarian to be sure the entire structure has been passed. If you have any additional questions or concerns about delivery or caring for a newborn foal, please contact your veterinarian for further instruction.

