

May 2019 Equine newsletter

Foaling and Pregnancy

With the last few months seeing the start of us swabbing and scanning mares for pre-breeding. We still eagerly await the pitter patter of tiny hoofs at some studs. If you are thinking of covering your mare it is useful to know a little more about foaling and what to watch for during pregnancy.

How common are abortions?

About 10% of mares will lose their pregnancy between day 60 & term. Abortions that happen at less than 4 months of pregnancy usually get unnoticed so it is important to monitor your mare for signs of coming back into season, to identify if the size of her abdomen isn't increasing or if there is any vulval discharge.

Aborted fetuses are often taken by wildlife if the mare is out at grass, so it can be easy to miss them.

If you are worried your mare has aborted or think she may be about to abort it is important to let your vet know. The aborting mare can potentially be in danger of health issues herself such as a retained placenta or sepsis. It is important to check both the mare and the aborted foal for signs of infection or anything that can put the mare's health in serious danger.

What should I do if my mare aborts?

- Call the vet to come and examine your mare and the aborted foal. The cause in some cases might be obvious, such as twins or a twisted umbilical cord. In other cases, samples may need to be taken to identify an infectious agent. This may provide information for management changes or therapeutic interventions to prevent further pregnancy losses.
- Try not to move her! Moving your mare will only contaminate even more space. Try to isolate her as much as possible.
- When handling your mare wear protective clothes, gloves and different shoes to reduce the risk of spreading any infection to other horses.
- You also need to monitor your mare closely (how much she eats, drinks, temperature, any discharge and any lactation).

Can we stop abortions happening?

The majority of abortions occur due to non infectious causes, such as over long umbilical cords and twins. We can't impact the length of the umbilical cord but we can scan and "crush" a twin to try and ensure the survival of the other twin. Hence it is important to scan your mare at 18 days to check for twins.

One infectious cause of abortion that we can treat is placentitis. Placentitis is an inflammation of the placenta. It can cause vulval discharge, udder development and early lactation. The earlier we can identify and treat placentitis the higher our chances of preventing an abortion. If you are worried your mare is showing signs of placentitis it is important to ring your vet as soon as possible.

We can also reduce the chances of Equine Herpes Virus abortion by vaccinating your mare at 5, 7 and 9 months. Unfortunately the vaccine doesn't guarantee it will completely remove the risk but it can help reduce it.



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Keeping your mare away from groups of youngstock and horses that are out competing regularly can also help reduce the risk of infectious causes of abortion. Good biosecurity throughout your mare's pregnancy is incredibly important, if you want any advice on how to achieve this at your yard, your vet will be able to offer advice and guidance.

Can mares get mastitis?

Mares can get mastitis, they get a swollen, painful udder with white to yellowish discharge. This can be incredibly uncomfortable and can occur during pregnancy and afterwards. If you are concerned about your mare it is important to call your vet.

Spontaneous mastitis can also happen in mares not in foal, especially in the summer. Not only is the condition uncomfortable for your mare but it can also result in the formation of scar tissue. This scar tissue can compromise how effective the udder will be for producing milk. So early treatment is again important.

What other things should I look out for in my pregnant mare?

Pregnant mares are also at risk of laminitis so it is important to check their digital pulses regularly. They also may get colic due to the decreased space in their abdomen for their organs and due to foal movement. So it is also important to keep a close eye on your mare from this aspect.

How can I tell my mare is about to foal?

Mares about to foal often become restless and show behavioural changes. They can start developing an udder up to 6 weeks before foaling but close to foaling they "wax" up, where they get a small amount of dried milk/calcium deposit on the end of their teats. It is useful to monitor your mare with CCTV cameras so you can check her at all hours. If you can't monitor your mare overnight it may be worth considering sending her to a stud to foal. Time is of the essence if something goes wrong during foaling so it important to be able to identify any problems quickly.

What are the stages of foaling?

Normal foaling has 3 stages.

Stage 1 can last from 2 hours and up to 24 hours, as your mare can control this stage. If your mare becomes stressed, the environment is too noisy, there are too many people watching her, she'll remain in this stage for longer. Hence most horses give birth at night.

During stage one your mare may become restless, look at her flank and shift her weight.

Stage 2 begins with the water breaking and ends with the delivery of the foal. This should take less than 30 minutes. The mare might lie down during that stage and stay down for about 45 minutes, even if the foal is born in the first 10 minutes. Please allow the umbilicus to break naturally and clean the foal's nose if something is covering it. When the mare is up you can tie her placenta if it's hanging too low and there's a danger that she'll step on it Try not to intervene if everything looks normal.

Stage 3 is the delivery of the placenta, this must occur within 3 hours or your mare can become very unwell. The placenta should be kept and inspected to ensure that there are no pieces missing.

Over 90% of foalings go well without any human interference.

What should I worry about at foaling?

If a thick, velvety, reddish bag appears inside the mare which you can feel the foal in, you need to cut the bag open immediately and alert your vet. This situation is called a red bag delivery and is an emergency. The placenta in this incidence has separated early and is being delivered with the foal. As a result, the oxygen supply to the foal cut off too early so the foal can't breath.

If foaling is taking too long it is important to call your vet as it may be the foal is too large or is malpresented. If you have any concerns about foaling it is useful to speak to your vet before hand.

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