

## **Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic (2002) Ltd**



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### **Foaling Season – Foal and Mare Care**

At long last spring is upon us and with it comes the amazing birth of those long legged foals. For the expectant owners it has been a long wait. The average gestation is 335-340 days but can be anywhere from 320 to 365 days. After the long wait, here are some tips to keeping both the mare and the foal as healthy as possible before, during and immediately after foaling.

Getting a healthy foal on the ground starts with a healthy mare. During the last trimester of pregnancy, the foal is growing rapidly and the mare needs additional nutrition including good quality hay and often a grain or concentrate supplement. Good quality mineral and salt should be available at all times. It is recommended that mares get vaccinated with Pneumabort vaccine at 5, 7 and 9 months of pregnancy to protect against abortions caused by equine herpes virus (Rhinopneumonitis). Regular annual vaccinations for protection against Equine Herpes Virus, Eastern and Western Encephalomyelitis, Tetanus and Influenza should be given 4-8 weeks before foaling. Vaccinating before foaling allows time for the mare to form antibodies against these diseases which will go into the colostrum and help protect the newborn foal. Because some parasites can be passed from the mare to the foal in the milk, it is advisable to deworm the mare before foaling. We would be happy to discuss specific vaccination or deworming programs.

Each mare is different but as most mares get close to their delivery date, they will show some or all of the following signs:

- 1) Udder development which generally occurs over the last month of gestation
- 2) Relaxation of the ligaments around the tail and pelvis and relaxation of the vulva which generally occurs during the last week
- 3) “Waxing up” which means there is a small amount of secretion on the ends of the teats which may occur hours to days prior to foaling

- 4) Electrolyte concentrations change in the milk 24-48 hours before foaling. Specialized test kits are available to check the electrolyte concentrations in the milk.

The stages of labor in mares are very similar to those in other species of animals including cows but occur very rapidly. Stage 1 is seen when uterine contractions begin and can last 4-14 hours. Generally the mare will sweat, look at her flank, groan, swish her tail, drip milk and act uncomfortable. Stage 2 is the active stage of labor. It begins when the placental membrane or water bag breaks and ends with the birth of the foal. This stage is very brief and lasts 5-30 minutes. Generally one foot is seen first, followed shortly by the second foot and finally the muzzle (mouth and nose) of the foal. Stage 3 is the expulsion of the placenta and should occur 30 minutes to 3 hours after the birth of the foal. In a normal delivery, the mare should be left alone to do her job.

A veterinarian should be contacted immediately if the water bag breaks and there is no evidence of the foal within 20 minutes, only one leg appears or the feet appear with the soles facing upwards, a red bag or sack appears before the foal, or the placenta isn't expelled within 4 hours after the birth of the foal.

Once the foal is born it should be evaluated to ensure everything is normal. Respiration rates are usually 60 breaths/minute and heart rates can range from 80-120 beats/minute. Providing things appear normal, it is best to not interfere and let the mare clean the foal and bond with it. The umbilical cord usually breaks when the mare stands up and shouldn't be cut. Generally foals will be sitting up within 5 minutes of birth, standing within an hour of delivery and nursing within 2 hours. It is critical foals get at least 1.5 liters of good quality colostrum within the first 24 hours of life. Colostrum has the greatest benefit during the first 6-12 hours of birth. Colostrum from the foal's dam is the best but if this isn't available frozen mare's colostrum will work. In an emergency if there is no mare's colostrum available cow, goat or commercial colostrum is better than none at all. Foals should pass their first manure (known as meconium) within 12 hours of birth.

**COLOSTRUM BANK:** The Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic is going to start a mare colostrum bank so there is frozen colostrum available for emergencies. If you have a mare that foals and has the misfortune of losing the foal, please milk the colostrum from her and freeze it in a plastic freezer bag and bring it to the Vet Clinic. We will keep it frozen and have it available for anybody that has a foal that has lost its mom. Thankyou in advance for your cooperation in this matter.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact one of the veterinarians at the Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic.