

SOUTH EAST COUNTRY VETS

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FOALING... PREPARING FOR THE BIG EVENT

PREPARING YOUR PREGNANT MARE

Gestation period for a mare is normally 320-370 days. Knowing your mares approximate due date will allow you to gauge when to start checking her regularly for signs of impending foaling. Remember though that a due date in horses is actually just an estimate of foaling date – they will decide when the time is right!

VACCINATIONS & IMMUNITY

Mares should be vaccinated with their tetanus and/or strangles booster 2-3 months prior to foaling to make sure adequate antibodies are present in the colostrum for the foal. Bring the mare into the foaling paddock 6-8 weeks prior to foaling to allow adequate antibodies against her immediate environment to be present in her colostrum. If the mare starts to run her milk early, she may lose a lot of valuable colostrum that the foal will not then receive. If this happens, try to catch as much of it as you can and freeze it. This can then be given to the foal soon after birth to provide it with much needed antibodies.

DIET

Your mare should be on a normal diet for the first 2 trimesters of pregnancy. In the third trimester, the foal will grow rapidly and the mare may need extra nutrition. Good quality hay/forage should make up the bulk of the mares' diet – few mares require additional supplements.

LOCATION

Your mare should be settled in the area she is going to give birth at least a month prior to her foaling date. This will reduce any unnecessary transport or movement when she is heavily pregnant and also assist in appropriate immunity development.

THE FOALING GUIDE

In the days and weeks prior to foaling you will see:

- Vulva relaxation and swelling
- Udder development in the month leading up to her due date
- Oedema/swelling on the underline of her belly may develop a few days prior to foaling
- Teats "wax up" 1-4 days prior to foaling
- Behavioural changes such as nervousness and laying down more often than usual

Stage 1

- Often starts in the early hours of the morning and normally lasts 1-4 hours.
- The mare will show signs that look like mild colic (restless, mild contractions, biting sides, kicking belly, sweating).
- During this stage the mare's water will break.

Stage 2

- The actual birth of the foal should only last 20-30 minutes.
- Mare will lay on her side and deliver the foal's front legs, one slightly in front of the other with hooves facing down followed by the nose, head, neck, shoulders.

Stage 3

- When the foal is delivered the umbilical cord will be intact. The movement of the mare will break it. Do not interfere with it as the foal is still receiving blood from it.
- Do not disturb the mare and foal during this stage. It is normal for the mare and foal to stay in sternal recumbency for 30-40 minutes post foaling.
- Passing of the placenta should occur 1-2 hours after foaling. Keep the placenta aside to assess it and make sure that it has been passed intact.

EMERGENCIES

HOW DO I KNOW IF THE MARE IS HAVING PROBLEMS?

The process of foaling can go from being normal to a serious veterinary emergency in less than an hour so it is important that the mare is monitored closely throughout the foaling process.

Prolonged Stage 1 Labour – if the mare exhibits signs of colic that do not resolve with walking and the birthing progress does not progress, there may be uterine abnormalities.

Red Bag – if the water does not break but a red bag emerges, the placenta has detached early which causes a lack of oxygen and potential death of the foal.

Prolonged Stage 2 Labour – if the actual birth of the foal takes more than 30min this is an emergency.

Retained Placenta – if the placenta is not passed within 2-3hrs of foaling, veterinary attention is required before serious complications occur.

Mares with Colic Symptoms (up to 100 days post-foaling) – Prompt attention is critical if a mare shows any signs of colic, as conditions like uterine torsion, intestinal displacement, or large colon volvulus can be life-threatening and more likely during this period.

Signs to watch for:

- Restlessness, pawing, or rolling.
- Sweating or labored breathing.
- Refusal to eat or drink.
- Unexplained discomfort or pain.

IMPORTANT NOTES ON CARING FOR YOUR FOAL

- The umbilical cord should be dipped in diluted iodine several times during the first 24 hours. NEVER USE DETOL.
- The foal should be on its feet within 1-2 hours and suckling within 3 hours of birth.
- The foal should pass its meconium (first faeces) and urinate within 6 hours of birth. If not, CALL YOUR VET.
- Foals should be wormed from 2 weeks of age and vaccinations can start at 3 months of age.



REMEMBER, all mares and foals are individuals and specific times listed above are what we "Normally" expect. If you have any concerns about your mare or foal please contact us at any time.

This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation. It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your horses health.