



My mare is due to foal.... What to expect? What to do?

Preparing your mare:

When preparing your mare to foal, there are many things to consider. Is she up to date with vaccinations? Do I need to feed her more? When should I move her to quiet environment?

The most important thing when dealing with a mare in her last trimester is to keep all **stresses** to a minimum. There should be no sudden changes to her routine, her environment or her feeding. She should be in the environment where she will foal and where the foal will spend at least its first month of life. This is not only to reduce stress on the mare, but more importantly to allow the colostrum she produces and feeds to her foal, to contain as much protection as possible from the environmental pathogens the foal will be exposed to once born. We strongly advise all horses to be routinely **vaccinated** against influenza and tetanus and recommend that a pregnant mare receive a booster vaccine 4-8 weeks prior to foaling. This will enable the foal to receive passive immunization for the first 4-6 months of life, via the mares' colostrum as foals are born with no immunity at all. The **worming** regime for a pregnant mare is different to a normal horse. She should be wormed approx 2 months after breeding then again 90 days later, with a final treatment 30-45 days prior to foaling.

Another aspect of mare preparation is **nutrition**. One wants to aim for a "fit, not fat" mare at parturition. The mare should have a body condition score of between 5-7/9. There is no need to increase the amount of feed she receives until the last trimester. At this time, it should be a very slow gradual increase. An ideal diet would consist of good quality forage and a quality commercial concentrate designed for brood mares as this will contain correct levels of calcium, phosphorus and trace minerals to ensure optimal development of the foal and health of the mare. Towards the end of her gestation, the foal will take up a large amount of space in the mares abdomen, meaning she will not be able to eat large meals in one feed. At this time, she would benefit from small feeds regularly throughout the day.

Also note, if the mare has had a **caslick** preformed, it should be opened 2-3 days before the foaling date.

The foaling:

Many mares will manage to foal without any assistance. They are also very sensitive to disturbances and unrequired intervention. When your mare starts to foal, it is best to keep a quiet distance while also keeping an eye on developments.

- Lead up to foaling:

- = ~ 2 weeks before foaling date: abdomen will change shape, to fill out flank area more
- = ~ 1 week before foaling: udder begins to increase in size
- = 24-48 hours before foaling: mares teats become waxy. As parturition gets closer, milk may begin to trickle out. Monitor this, as this will be the vital colostrum the foal needs and if a lot has dripped out before the foal arrives, it may need extra supplementation.

The foaling:

- Stage 1: lasts 2-4hours. Do not disturb mare in this time. She will be restless, possibly seem mildly colicky and have patchy sweating as the uterine contractions start.
- Stage 2: the waters break, abdominal contractions occur and the foal should appear within 20mins. If not, call the vet. Once the foal is born, watch to ensure mare clears its head of the amnion. You may need to assist with this.
- Stage 3: the mare should pass her cleansing within 4hours of birth. If not, call the vet.

Please either examine the placenta fully or keep it for the vet to examine to ensure it has all been removed.

Congratulations! You have a newborn foal!

Caring for the newborn foal:

- A new born foal should
 - stand in <2 hours
 - suckle in <3 hours
 - urinate in <8 hours

void meconium in 12-24hours – if not may show mild colicky signs +/- swish tail alot
- may need an enema to aid passage

You should dip the **naval** twice a day for 2-3 days

As mentioned previously, foals are born with no immunity so it is vital that they ingest approx 4L of **colostrum** over the first 24hours of life. To ensure the foal has received adequate passive transfer of antibody, we strongly recommend measuring the foals **IgG levels** from 12-24hours of age. At Parkside we have powdered colostrum in stock and we carry IgG test kits with us. If the results show that a 24hour foal has low levels then it will require a plasma transfusion to reduce the risk of sepsis occurring. We have frozen plasma at the practice if required.

Mare after foaling:

After the foal has arrived, the mare will produce up to 3% of her body weight in milk each day. Therefore she will require a steadily rising plane of **nutrition** to support this milk production. A mare's peak lactation occurs when the foal is approx 6-8weeks old. She should continue to be fed good quality forage with a commercial concentrate for broodmares, to ensure she receives the correct levels of calcium, phosphorus and minerals.

The Foal:

Foals should receive their first **vaccination** from 6months of age (Flu+Tet). However, if the mare was not vaccinated 4-8weeks prior to foaling, the foal should receive a tetanus vaccine at 4 months old.

A foal should be **wormed** at 6-8 weeks old (with panacur), repeated at 6-8 week intervals for 3 doses.

By approximately 1 month of age, the foal can begin **creep feeding**.