



The Pregnant Mare

Tennessee Equine Hospital wants to help ensure that your mare's pregnancy goes as smoothly as possible. Here are some recommendations for pregnant mare care and preparation for foaling.

27-30 days of gestation (pregnancy)

We recommend a rectal ultrasound to confirm that your mare is still pregnant. We can detect the fetal heartbeat at this time and can also double-check for twins.

Equine Herpes Virus (Rhinopneumonitis)

Equine Herpes Virus (EHV) types 1 and 4 are common respiratory viruses in horses especially young horses. These viruses can also cause abortions in pregnant mares. The tricky thing about EHV is that it can become dormant in a horse's body. During times of stress, the virus can become active and cause disease. Abortions may be the result of this reactivation or exposure to the virus from other horses. Abortions due to EHV occur in the last trimester of gestation.

To decrease the risk of abortion, keep pregnant mares separate from young or traveling horses and vaccinate throughout pregnancy to maintain solid immunity. We recommend vaccinating at 3, 5, 7, and 9 months of pregnancy.

Fetal sexing

Ultrasound allows us to identify the sex of your fetus! The best time to do this is when the fetus is between 60 -90 days or 120 -150 days old.

Month 10 of gestation

The best time to give your mare her annual vaccinations is 4-6 weeks before her due date. This will allow the mare time to develop a strong immune response and produce immune complexes, called immunoglobulins. High levels of these immunoglobulins concentrate in the colostrum and transfer immunity to the foal.

Deworm your mare at this time to decrease the amount of parasite eggs passed after foaling

Fescue Toxicity

The majority of fescue grasses are infected with an endophyte called *Neotyphodium coenophialum*. Although this fungus helps the fescue thrive, it produces toxins that interfere with reproductive function in the mare. Fescue is the predominant pasture grass in this area, so assume your pasture and grass hay is infected unless you can verify otherwise. Pregnant mares should be removed from fescue-containing pasture and hay at least 45-60 days prior to her due date. Good alternate hay types are Timothy grass hay and alfalfa; a mixture of the two is great forage for brood mares. The most common sign of fescue toxicosis is a lack of milk production. Other problems are prolonged gestation, thickened placenta, red bag delivery, and large weak foals or stillbirths.

Preparing for foaling

Preplanning can prevent disaster. First and foremost, have your veterinarian's phone number easily accessible. If you are new to foaling, having someone more experienced available may be a big help.

Wash the mare's udder and hind end a few days prior to her anticipated foaling. This will decrease exposure of the foal to debris when it tries to nurse. Make sure your foaling area is kept clean and dry and is an adequate size to allow for safe foaling. A base layer of shavings with a top layer of straw makes great foaling bedding.

Once the foal is out, let the mare and foal bond for a few minutes before rushing into the stall. They have both been through a traumatic experience!

Have a supply of clean towels to help dry the foal once the mare and foal have had a chance to bond. The foal's umbilical stump (naval) should be dipped in a disinfectant to protect against infection. Chlorhexidine (Nolvasan) SOLUTION diluted 1:4 with water is a great choice. Betadine can be used but is much more irritating to the foal's tender skin. A Fleet enema may be given to the foal to encourage passage of the meconium (formed fecal balls). Additional enemas should only be given under the advice of your veterinarian.

Changes in the mare as foaling nears

Most due dates are calculated as 341 days after ovulation, although the normal gestational length can vary between 320 and 360 days. An individual mare will usually be fairly consistent in gestation length from year to year, so knowing your mare's foaling history can be helpful.

There are several changes in the mare's body that will help determine when the mare is getting close to foaling. Two to four weeks before foaling, the mare will start to develop an udder, which will become more engorged within days of foaling. Any mare that bags up and starts producing milk prior to the 10th month of gestation should be examined by a veterinarian. This may indicate a problem with the pregnancy such as placental infection, an abnormality with the foal, or twins.

A few days prior to foaling, the muscles around the tail head will relax. Wax is usually seen on the teats 1-3 days before foaling, although it is easily knocked off and may be missed. Within 1 day of foaling, the mare's vulva will become swollen and elongated. The mare may also pass a large amount of manure the day of foaling.

The Birthing Process

We divide the birthing process (parturition) into three stages.

Stage 1: Preparation Period

This initial period may last for several hours prior to foaling. During this time, the foal is moving into the proper foaling position and the mare's reproductive tract is preparing for birth. The mare may be restless, circling, and get up and down repeatedly. Stage 1 ends with rupture of the allantoic membrane (water breaking).

Stage 2: Birth of the Foal

Once the water breaks, the foal should be born within 20 minutes. The two front feet should be visible first with the foal's nose extended on top of the legs. If this is not visible shortly after the water breaks or if significant progress does not occur in 10 minutes, the mare may require assistance. This should only be done by or under the guidance of someone experienced in foaling or a veterinarian. Once the foal is out, the umbilical cord should rupture naturally. This may not occur until the mare stands. If it does not break, do not cut the cord and seek assistance for the proper technique to break it without causing injury to the foal.

Stage 3: Passage of the Placenta

The mare should pass all of the placental membranes within 3 hours of foaling. The hanging end should be tied up above the mare's hocks but should not be cut because the natural weight will help loosen the rest of the placenta. A retained placenta should never be pulled! Contact your veterinarian if the placenta does not come out within 3 hours or is obviously incomplete. Once the placenta is out, remove it from the stall and place in a bag or bucket so your veterinarian can examine it the next day.

Problems after foaling

Contact your veterinarian if you observe any of the following problems:

- Placenta does not pass within 3-4 hours of birth
- There is an obvious piece of placenta missing.
- The mare is showing persistent signs of colic. (Some mares will be crampy while passing the placenta, but these signs should not be severe and should subside soon afterwards.)
- The mare is not passing manure within 6-12 hours after foaling.
- The mare has a poor appetite or fever (temp > 101 F).