

For Your Information

Courtesy Of:

Cotati Large Animal Hospital

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Pregnant Mares

While mares are pregnant, they need special attention to ensure both their health and the health of the foal. In the 5th, 7th and 9th months of gestation, mares require a rhinopneumonitis booster to protect against infectious abortions.

During the last three months of gestation, the foal is growing rapidly, and this is the time to consider increasing the mare's feed by 25%. Research has shown that the mare's diet in late gestation has a tremendous impact on the normal development of the fetus. Not only is the fetus increasing her energy demands, but also preparing for lactation. Feeds with a special formulation of mineral are available to be fed on a daily basis to provide a balanced ration for the mare and foal.

Finally, at 4-6 weeks prior to foaling, the mare should be dewormed and given a booster of 4-way (Eastern and Western Encephalitis, Tetanus, and Influenza), Rabies and West Nile vaccine to increase the level of protective antibodies in her colostrum.



* Foaling *

The average length of gestation is 335-350 days, and is influenced by the sex of the foal, month of conception and individual traits of the mare. Mares tend to prefer privacy during foaling, and most will foal at night.

Signs of approaching parturition:

- Development of mammary glands begins 2-6 weeks prior to foaling.
- Approximately 7-10 days prior to foaling, the muscles in the croup and around the tailhead begin to feel gelatinous and the vulva elongates.
- A waxy secretion oozes out of the nipples and begins to build up 1-4 days before foaling. Within 24 hours the wax may drop off and the mare will drip or stream milk.
- Finally the mare may sweat and show signs of colic (acting restless, frequently lying down, swishing her tail, looking at her flank).

The birthing process begins when the placenta ruptures and a small amount of urine-like fluid passes from the vulva (water breaking). Normal foaling should not last more than 30 minutes. The mare should not be disturbed during foaling and for a few hours after. The foal should be up and nursing within 2 hours of birth and the placenta should pass within 3 hours. The placenta should be saved for a veterinarian to exam at the post-foaling exam that day.

Postnatal Care

Once the umbilical cord breaks, it should be dipped in dilute nolvosan (1:5 dilution) to protect against infection. This should be repeated 2-3 times at 4 hour intervals. The foal should be observed closely to insure it stands and nurses within 2 hours of life. This is essential to make sure the foal gets as much colostrum as possible during the first 24 hours of life to have an adequate immune system. After this time the foal cannot absorb anymore antibodies from the colostrum.

Meconium, a dark colored fecal excrement, should pass in the first few hours of life. If not passed normally, the foal could have an impaction and may require an enema.

Both the mare and the foal should receive a post-foaling exam during the first day of birth. A physical exam of the foal will reveal any congenital defects and a blood sample will be taken to check for adequate levels of maternal antibodies absorbed from the colostrum.

If a foal is deficient and it is too late to absorb additional antibodies through oral administration of colostrum, then the foal can be given an intravenous infusion of hyper-immune plasma to correct the antibody deficiency. If the mare did not receive her vaccine boosters 1 month prior to foaling, then the foal may need to be given a Tetanus Antitoxin shot at this time.