What to Do When your Mare is Foaling

The last few weeks of Pregnancy:
- The udder begins to fill with milk about 2 weeks prior to foaling
- Muscles of the vulva and croup relax the few days prior to foaling
- Waxing of the teats occurs 1-4 days prior to foaling
  - Some mares will leak milk for a few days before foaling → critical colostrum can be lost!!
  - Thin straw coloured fluid changes to milky white → thickens and becomes more yellow/orange indicating good quality colostrum

Stages of Labour during Foaling

Stage 1 of Labour (30min – 4 hours)
- Your mare might begin to act colicky, lie down, sweat, look at her, flank, posture, lift her tail, urinate
- Uterine contractions are increasing and the foal is rotating position to enter the birth canal
- During this time you can clean your mare’s perineum with warm water and wrap the tail
  - Be careful not to wrap too tightly or to leave the wrap on too long!!
- The chorioallantoic membrane ruptures (water breaks) and allantoic fluid leaks out

Stage 2 of Labour (20-30min)
- The foal begins to pass into the birth canal and there are intense uterine contractions
- The mare will often lie on her side or stand up/lie down again
- You should see a glistening white/grey sac (the amnion) begin to protrude from the vulva → The foal should be delivered with one front foot in front of the other, then the head
- If this continues for more than an hour without any signs of a foal CALL THE VET
- Once the foals hips have passed through the pelvis the mare will often rest for 15-20 minutes → as long as the amnion has ruptured, the foal is breathing normally and is lying in sternal they can be left undisturbed
- The umbilical cord is best left to be ruptured naturally
  - NEVER cut the cord – this can lead to bleeding!!

Stage 3 of Labour (30min – 3hours)
- Expulsion of the placenta and fetal membranes
  - The placenta can be tied up to itself to keep the mare from stepping on it and prematurely tearing
- **Be sure to KEEP the placenta so your vet can make sure it has all been passed!!

Foaling Emergencies

Remember, every mare is unique and these are just general guidelines

*NEVER try to pull the foa!*

Pulling can cause damage to the mare’s repro tract, the foal, or prematurely tear the umbilical cord causing the foal to not get enough oxygen!

The Rule of 3
1) The foal should stand within 1 hour!
2) The foal should nurse vigorously within 2 hours!
3) The mare should pass her placenta within 3 hours!

*If any of these seem delayed call your veterinarian!
“Red Bag” foaling
- If you see a red bag protruding from your mares vulva where there should be a grey sac immediately call your veterinarian!
- This means that the inner sac has ruptured and your foal is not getting appropriate oxygen
  - This red sac needs to be ruptured immediately using your hands or a blunt object!!!

“Dummy Foal” – Neonatal Maladjustment Syndrome / Perinatal Asphyxia Syndrome
- Thought to be related to hypoxia → The brain is deprived of oxygen during birth
- Foal is weak or unable to stand without assistance
- Does not appear to recognize dam, poor suckle reflex or unable to figure out how to nurse
  (often suck the legs or flanks instead of the udder)

Problems Urinating or Defecating
- Urine dripping from umbilicus instead of penis/vulva
- If the foal shows any signs of colic (rolling, laying on his back)
- If the foal appears to be straining to urinate/defecate or has not passed any manure in the first 6 hours

Don’t forget the Mare!
It is just as important to check over the mare after foaling!
- A difficult foaling can cause injury to the vulva requiring repair
- Watch her closely for signs of colic, we just made a lot of room in her abdomen and sometimes she can get gased up or her gut can move around (displacement or even twist)
- Watch closely for signs of depression, going off feed, fever, discomfort or heat in her feet that may indicate she has an infection
- A small amount of watery red/brown discharge with no odour is normal for the first 4-5 days after foaling

My Veterinarian’s Name: 

Phone Number: 

Foals can deteriorate very rapidly. Especially if they are unable to nurse and get severely dehydrated very quickly!

Do not hesitate to call your veterinarian with any questions or concerns regarding your new foal!