**Foaling**

Spring is a wonderful time of the year and is synonymous with new life. Unfortunately, along with new life come problems. The secret to minimizing these is to be prepared. Knowing what to expect, what is normal and what is not, can be crucial to achieving a happy result.

If you are going to be foaling a mare and are not experienced, please talk to us about what to expect. With mares things can go horribly wrong very quickly. Don’t wait until 2am on the fateful night to enquire. We will be there to help you but like to know in advance who, where and what to expect.

With foaling, everything happens very quickly. Second stage labour, when the mare is actively straining hard, is usually less than 30 minutes. If there is little or no progress after 10 to 15 minutes phone the vet.

What is progress? The first sign is a glistening white membrane coming from the vulva. Within this is one front leg followed by the other and then the head. Each of the really strong contractions should push it a little further out. The mare will be down on her side, but may stand and walk around for a couple of minutes, the legs may disappear back in, but then she will go back down again.

Don’t disturb the mare unless she has problems. Remember they have been doing this on their own for a few million years so don’t necessarily need any help from us. Flashing cameras, the neighbours and their children are also all unhelpful. However, if it looks like she needs a help, the vet hasn’t arrived and the legs and head are there, sneak up behind her, break the bag if you need to and grasp the legs with a dry towel and pull. Don’t pull the foal right out and break the cord. The cord is still providing vital blood for the foal so just pull until the hips are through and then sneak away. The mare may rest for ten minutes or more before she stands and then breaks the cord.

The foal should stand within two hours and drink shortly after. Obviously, if the foal is not standing it is not drinking and this can be critical to its survival, especially on a wet, cold night. Talk to us about your plan if this should happen.

The placenta comes away usually within two or three hours. Check it is all there. This is vital as a retained placenta or even a bit of placenta retained can cause a serious life threatening toxaemia after 24 hours. We will check the placenta as part of a standard post foaling examination, so put it in a bucket and protect it from dogs and seagulls until we can check it out.

This is a very brief overview of foaling. There are many other considerations such as opening a caslick prefoaling, tears to the mare’s vulva, tetanus, limb deformities of the foal, dummy foals, post foaling haemorrhage or infections, navel ill and joint infections, white muscle disease, salmonella and preparation of the mare for breeding again to list a few.

All sound a bit daunting? Talk to us. Be prepared.