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April 2018 Newsletter

Babies!

It's the time of year for babies to start arriving and as such, we need to be ready for their arrival. Here are some tips and tricks for having a successful delivery of your foal and hopefully take a little stress out of your life.

The first thing to remember is that mares like to foal in quiet, familiar environments. If they are not comfortable, they are perfectly happy to cross their legs and wait until they are. If you're going to move the mare, do so at least two weeks before she is due so she has time to become comfortable in her new environment. If she is going to foal in the pasture, it's important to remove her from the herd as even other pregnant mares can interfere too soon after birth. If the mare is out in a pasture with other horses, she oftentimes spends so much time protecting her new baby from curious onlookers that she forgets she has another job to do.

Mares need a clean, dry area to foal in. A pasture is fine for foaling as long as there is a good, grassy coverage of the whole area so the mare doesn't risk getting dirt in her uterus, and the foal doesn't ingest a bunch of dirt before he's even gotten off the ground. If she's foaling in a stall, it's ideal to have a layer of clean straw between the foal and the ground to avoid contamination of the mare and foal with dirt and shavings. If you plan on doing foal watch either in person or by camera, remember that mares are perfectly capable of delaying birth if they feel like someone is disturbing them. Getting your mare used to lights being on at all times needs to be done at least two weeks before her due date and is extremely important if you want to be present for the birth.

Foaling prediction kits are a MUST for people who want to be nearby for the birth. Many people want their veterinarian to check their mare and tell them when they are going to foal. As veterinarians, we aren't any more accurate at predicting the date than you are! However, with a simple milk test (we offer a pH test that has a 97% accuracy to within three days) you are able to know when you need to start watching your mares more closely and when it's safe to get some sleep. As mentioned before, it's important to get your mare used to lights if you are going to be checking on her throughout the night. Turning lights on and off every few hours as you go out and check will disturb your mare and keep her from foaling. If you can leave a door open so you don't have to make noise as you're entering, it's even better. It's best if one person can peek around a corner without bothering the mare.

Once active labor begins (where the mare is actively pushing) she has 20 minutes to deliver the foal. Most mares are able to do this without assistance, so avoid going in her stall during this stage. If delivery takes longer than 20 minutes, or if you notice that the foal isn't in the "diving" position (front legs together with the nose resting on the knees), then it is time to call your veterinarian. If you wind up

needing to assist your mare with foaling, as soon as the baby is out, LEAVE THE STALL! Don't try to bring baby around to mama as this can disrupt the umbilicus too early, or dry the baby off. It's important to let the mare rest after her ordeal, and for her to then bond with her foal before human intervention is attempted.

I cannot stress enough how important it is for the mare to have peace and quiet during foaling. The more people that are around, the more stressed the mare will get and this can adversely affect the foal. One or two people present to assist if necessary is ok, but avoid having four or five people present. If you must assist with foaling, do so quietly and then immediately leave the stall, even if the hind feet of the foal are still in the mare as this is completely normal.

Some things to have handy for the foal at the time of foaling are a tetanus antitoxin, an enema, and some dilute chlorhexidine or betadine solution to dip the navel in. It may also be handy to have some OB gloves and lube, as well as rubber gloves in case you need to assist your mare or the foal. Oxytocin may also be helpful after birth to help the mare deliver her placenta. A nearby halter can also be helpful as sometimes mares, especially new mothers, forget that they need to let their foals nurse because they get too worried about letting the foal out of their sight. Remember: after birth, a mare has 4 hours to deliver her placenta. If this does not occur, veterinary assistance is a MUST. DO NOT attempt to just pull as this can tear the placenta and make it more difficult to retrieve. Retained placentas are an emergency as they can cause severe infections and even laminitis if even a piece is left in for too long.

Having your veterinarian out within the first few hours of birth can help to identify any issues with the foal and hopefully prevent more severe problems from developing later on. An IgG should be pulled between 12 and 24 hours after birth to assure adequate colostrum intake. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to call your veterinarian.

Castration Signs: April 5th thru 12th 2018