

Preparing your Foaling Kit:

11 months can seem like a very long wait, that is until time does what time does so well, and before you know it, breeding season has turned into foaling season. Having a well-stocked foaling kit and knowing how to use its contents will save you time and added stress if things don't go just as planned and even when they do.

Having a good record keeping system is part of what makes a breeding program successful. As your mare gets closer to her foaling date you'll want to make sure you know her exact breeding dates which will help you determine significant dates that are approaching such as when her 30 day pre foaling vaccines are due, when her "early watch" dates starts, when the cut off date is for her last pre foaling farrier visit (it's best to schedule her last pre foaling farrier appointment several weeks before her due date especially with mares who have an increased risk of laminitis). There are a variety of online foaling calculators available which can also provide handy printable charts with the information above when you input your mare's breeding dates.

This is also a great time to refresh your memory on the acceptable ranges for a foals vitals, study up on new techniques or procedures as well as speak with your veterinarian and see if there are any new precautions or recommendations they have.

Items for your Foaling Kit:



Clean towels:

There are many uses for clean, absorbent towels during this process. They are best stored in a lidded container to keep them as clean as possible. Make sure any towels you use have not been washed with fabric softener or dried with dryer sheets as both products can cause irritation or even allergic reactions in newborn foals. I recommend at least 6 large bath towels for each birth. It can also be helpful to keep some smaller hand towels for clearing amniotic fluid from the nostrils, wiping your own hands, etc...

Vetwrap:

This is used for wrapping the mare's tail prior to foaling. Tail wraps cannot be left on for over 24 hours at a time and should not be applied too tightly. A tail wrap applied too tightly or left on for too long can cause irreversible damage to the mare's tail bone and in severe cases, cause necrosis and require surgical removal of the entire tail. It is best to wait to wrap the tail until foaling appears to be imminent but we all know mares can be misleading with their signs so there may be times that we jump the gun in wrapping their tail. When this happens just remove the wrap after 24 hours, carefully inspect the dock for any signs that the wrap may have been applied too tightly and as long as all looks well a new wrap can be applied.

Disposable scalpel:

In most cases, you won't need to cut the umbilical cord as it will break on its own. On occasion, a mare will pass the placenta before the cord has broken, though and that's where having a scalpel on hand will come in handy. This may also be used VERY CAREFULLY to assist with a Red Bag delivery where the placenta is delivered before the foal. Red Bag deliveries are an EMERGENCY and there is rarely time to call a vet. From the time the Red Bag becomes apparent to the time the foal becomes oxygen deprived can be less than 10 minutes. You will need to manually open the placental membrane and deliver the foal as quickly as possible. The placenta itself can be very difficult to tear open, unlike the amniotic sac which is relatively easy to open. This is where a scalpel can be very helpful as long as you are careful to not cut the foal.

Sterile Lubricant:

You will want this on hand if in an emergency you need to manually adjust the foal's position during the birthing process. You would start by putting on shoulder length OB Gloves and then applying the sterile lubricant to the back of your gloved hand, all the way up to your elbow. These situations would include presentation of only one hoof and the nose, making it likely that the other front leg is tucked back or the presentation of both front hooves but no nose, meaning the head and neck may be turned back. This produce is also ideal for lubricating the tip of a thermometer or enema.

Enema kit:

Most online breeding supply stores carry foal enema kits but you can also purchase human versions at your local pharmacy. Just make sure it's a "Fleet Enema" with saline and check to make sure the tip is pre lubricated before use. Ideally I like to keep a baby bottle warmer on hand to warm the enema slightly before giving it to the foal. A thermos with warm water can also do the trick but you need to make sure the water temperature is no higher than body temperature which is around 100-101F or 38C. We give one enema before the foal stands and a second one after about 30-60 minutes if the foal is straining or doesn't have a strong suckle reflex. Meconium impactions can be deadly to foals and at the very least, they are quite uncomfortable and they can also reduce their urge to nurse. When giving a foal an enema, care must be taken to avoid damaging the sensitive rectal tissue. Make sure to remove the cap and check that the tip is well lubricated. You will need good lighting to do this so if the stall is dark make sure to use a headlamp or have an assistant holding a flashlight. Gently insert the tip fully into the rectum, stopping if you feel any resistance. Once in place slowly and steadily start to squeeze the bottle until the contents have been fully expelled and then gently remove the tip from the rectum. Enemas are fairly easy and safe to give, however the rectal tissue is very delicate and a tear in that tissue could be deadly. This is why having good lighting is so important along with a steady and gentle application. If the foal is moving around quite a bit and you don't feel comfortable giving the enema safely then wait until you have someone to help hold the foal steady for you. When in doubt, you should always call a veterinarian to either come out or talk you through the process over the phone.

Nolvasan or 2% solution of chlorhexidine:

We use this product for dipping the umbilical stump at birth and then 2-3 times per day for the first few days. You will want to use a small, open topped container for dipping the umbilical stump. We

prefer a 50/50 solution of Nolvasan and water in a lidded specimen cup for dipping the umbilical stump.

Specimen cup/Small Container:

This is the container we use to dip the umbilical stump. A sterile specimen cup is our preferred choice. They come with a lid which allows us to premix the Nolvasan and water so it's ready to use. Some people use shot glasses as they can be sterilized for reuse. Whatever container you choose to use, make sure it's deep enough to dip the stump all the way to the base, where it connects to the foal's body and always use a sterile container when possible.

Gloves:

It's helpful to have both exam and shoulder length OB gloves on hand. You will want the OB gloves if you need to help reposition the foal during the birthing process but exam gloves are much more practical for non-invasive procedures. OB gloves should be individually packaged and sterile if possible.

Flashlight/Headlamp:

Even in a well-lit stall there will be times you will want extra light in a specific area. It's also important to note that mares generally prefer to foal in a low light, quiet area and would much prefer the use of the headlamp or flash light over the use of an ultra bright, overhead floodlight. Make sure you have extra batteries on hand as well and if you do not use your kit very often you will be better off to take the batteries out of the flashlight while not in use. If your headlamp is rechargeable make sure to charge it each week and store the charging cord with it.

Watch:

From timing your mare's labor progression to checking vitals, having a watch or clock with a second hand is invaluable during foaling. It's important to note the time for certain milestones such as, first appearance of the amniotic sac, actual delivery of the foal, standing, nursing, passing meconium and the passing of the placenta.

Thermometer:

Digital thermometers can be quicker and easier to use but always make sure you have a back up as their batteries can die during long periods of storage or if they are exposed to moisture for a prolonged period of time. Care should be taken to test any new thermometer. Some basic considerations include making sure the probe is no shorter than inches, flexible tips are safest,

Dosing Syringe:

In the event that you need to give the foal colostrum you will want to have 35cc-60cc dosing syringe on hand.

Clean buckets:

For anything from carrying warm water and collecting dirty towels to a quick, makeshift seat for yourself.

Clean sheet:

To spread out the placenta for examination. (See next item)

Bucket with a secure lid:

This will be a safe way to store the placenta so your veterinarian can inspect it. It is advisable to thoroughly check the placenta yourself once it is passed but unless you are extremely well versed in all the potential abnormalities you should always have your veterinarian double check it. The most important thing you are looking for are missing pieces that may have been retained inside the mare. We start by laying the placenta out on a clean sheet and then organizing it in such a way that both horns are fully extended and the opening and cord are fully visible. There should only be one opening in the placenta, that is where the foal came through, the ends of both the developed and undeveloped horns should be fully intact. It is always a good idea to take photographs of the placenta while it's fully laid out, making sure to take close ups of anything you may find unusual as well as the cord itself. Depending on when your veterinarian will be able to examine it, there can be changes to the color over time and always a chance that even with a sealed bucket, a wily ranch dog could find a way to make off with it. Your veterinarian will want those pictures as reference in the event the placenta itself is not available for examination. If you aren't sure if the tip of one of the horns is intact you can also fill it with water to check for missing pieces. We like to make notes in our foaling book each year to give ourselves a reference point for what is normal for each mare. We make note of the color, size, any oddities, cord condition, etc... And we also keep the photographs we've taken for future reference. A piece of retained placenta can be deadly to a mare and at the very least lead to a serious infection.

Trash bag:

For disposal of the placenta once it has been fully inspected for any missing pieces or other abnormalities.

Umbilical clamp or dental floss:

These are used to tie off the umbilical cord if needed. As a general rule this is not something you will have to use very often. Most umbilical cords break on their own and in the appropriate place on the cord. In some cases, the umbilical cord does not break naturally, or may need to be cut before it can break naturally. An umbilical clamp will help prevent the umbilical stump from bleeding excessively, and help prevent navel infection in these situation. On rare occasion the cord can also break in such a way that it will cause the stump on the foal to bleed excessively which is another situation where a clamp will be needed. Umbilical clamps should be applied one inch from where the umbilicus attaches to the body of the foal. Any closer than that may lead to infection.

Round Tip Infant Nail Scissors:

We keep these on hand to safely cut the sutures on the Foalert Transmitters we use to alert us when the mare is starting to foal.

Foal blanket:

Be sure to wash the blanket between uses, making sure not to use fabric softener or dryer sheets. Mares have been known to reject or attack a foal if a blanket has the smell of another horse on it so it can also be helpful to rub the blanket over the mare's body before putting it on her foal.

Cellphone or a cordless phone:

Make sure they are fully charged and have reception where your mare will be foaling.

A list of important contact numbers:

You will want to have your veterinarian's phone number handy as well as a couple of local backups in case your veterinarian is on an emergency call and unavailable. It's also advisable to have a list of local friends you can call for help in an emergency. As your mare's due date approaches you will want to make contact with the veterinarians and your friends to make sure they are planning to be in town during that time.

Pen and notebook:

Useful for making note of questions or observations you want to share with your veterinarian, tracking the mare and foal's vitals after the birth and just general record keeping.

Storage container:

Last but not least, you will want a container to keep all of the items you've gathered clean, organized and easily accessible. We typically prefer to use a plastic caddy with some divided sections to help keep things separated. You want to use something that will be easy to clean and disinfect when needed].

Remember the 1-2-3 Rule

- 1: Foals should stand by one hour of age.
- 2: Foals should successfully nurse by two hours of age.
- 3: Mares should pass the placenta within three hours of delivery.