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FOALING – WHEN TO CALL A VET

There are 3 stages to a normal foaling:

STAGE 1 (30mins – 12hrs)

The first stage involves uterine contractions and cervical relaxation. This stage can vary from 30 minutes to six hours or more. This stage can be controlled, to some extent, by the mare and, if she is upset or not comfortable with her surroundings, she can postpone the start of the second stage of labour for hours and, sometimes, days.
During this first stage, the foal is actively getting into the correct position for the impending birth. Normal signs associated with the first stage of labour are rolling, pawing, kicking at the abdomen, anorexia, sweating and frequent urination.

STAGE 2 (10-60 mins)

The start of stage two labour occurs when the chorioallantois ruptures (commonly called 'waters breaking'), and a sudden release of tan- or red-coloured fluid expels from the vagina. Stage two is defined as the delivery of the foal, and should take only 10 minutes and no longer than 60 minutes.
During this stage, you will see active abdominal contractions and the mare may lay down. The contractions will come in waves, with the mare resting between waves.
Initially, you will see a bluish-white sac at the vulva, followed by two legs, one slightly in front of the other, and then the foal's muzzle. Once the foal enters the birth canal, the contractions usually become more frequent.

STAGE 3 (1-3hrs)

Stage three of labour involves the expulsion of the placental membranes and the onset of uterine involution. This stage should take between one and three hours. Immediately post-foaling, it is important to **allow the umbilical cord to rupture naturally** - whether it be when the mare stands or the foal attempts to stand. ***Only use the umbilical clamps IF the umbilicus is bleeding excessively after rupturing.***

Once the cord has ruptured, it is advised to **spray or soak the umbilical stump with betadine** to prevent infections tracking up the umbilical cord.

NEVER pull the placenta out of the mare as it will tear and leave portions within the mare. If the placenta is still present 3 hours after the birth of the foal please contact your vet to arrange for them to come out and help remove it safely.

NEWBORN FOAL'S VITAL SIGNS
Once delivered foals should be sitting in sternal within 5 minutes, have a suck reflex within 20 mins, standing within an hour and nursing within 2-3 hours.
It is good practice to record the newborn foal's vital signs at birth. The foal's temperature at birth should be 37.5-38 degrees. The foal's pulse rate at birth should be between 60-120 beats per minute. An abnormally slow or fast rate may indicate the foal may be compromised.
Following birth, the foal's respiration rate should be: 80 breaths per minute at birth; 40-60 breaths per minute at 15 mins old; 30-40 breaths per minute at 12 hours old.

WHEN TO CALL THE VET

• The waters have broken, but there's no sign of contractions or no further progress.

• There's malpresentation of the foal or stage 2 is taking longer than 30 mins.

• The placenta (red velvet looking material) has appeared at the vulva before the foal.

• The foal's hoof is emerging through the mare's anus.

• The foal is unwilling or unable to stand within one hour after birth.

• The foal is unwilling or unable to suckle within two hours after birth.

• The mare is showing signs of severe colic post-foaling.

• The placenta has not passed within four hours after birth.

• The foal's meconium has not passed within 12 hours afterbirth or the foal is straining to defecate. It is often a good practice to give all foals a fleet enema after they are standing and nursing to help prevent meconium impactions.

This picture is a "red bag" presentation and you should cut through the placenta which is a red velvet consistency to then allow the normal allantois and foal to be delivered. If in doubt please call the vet and even have your phone on facetime and they can assist you until they can get to your property. Time is of the essence in 2nd stage labour!

HEVC RECOMMEND ALL MARES AND FOALS ARE CHECKED 12-24 HRS AFTER BIRTH. The vet will check the mare and foal and will take a blood sample to check if the foal received adequate immunity from your mare's colostrum. The vet will also check the placenta is in tact and we recommend that once the placenta is expelled from the mare that you place it in a bucket away from animals that can try and eat it and out of the sun.

WHY THE FUSS ABOUT IGG? WHAT IS IT?

Foals are born without any immunoglobulins. This means that any minor pathogens (bugs) in the environment can cause severe illness. Foals will only start developing their own immunoglobulins from 6-8 weeks of age.

Foals receive these important immunoglobulins from their dam's colostrum. Colostrum is the thick honey consistency milk that the mare's produce in the last few days prior to foaling. If a mare leaks milk for long periods prior to foaling 1-2 days, this important colostrum is lost onto the ground and there will not be any left for the foal to receive. Foals only have the ability to absorb these important globulins through their gastrointestinal lining for up to 12 hours after birth.

An IGG test is essentially a test to see if the foal received enough immunoglobulins from their dam's milk. The result has 3 outcomes;

- >800mg/dl - Your foal has received and absorbed sufficient immunoglobulins from the mare's milk (insurance companies require a IGG >800mg/dl in order to take out insurance within the first 40days of birth).
- 400-800 mg/dl – Your foal has received some but not a sufficient amount of immunoglobulins from the mare's milk. In clean low stocking density grassy pastures that have not had many sick horses in the area, this level of immunoglobulins may be sufficient. In muddy/dirty or high stocking properties it is recommended that we boost this immunoglobulin
- <400 mg/dl – Your foal has not received sufficient immunoglobulins to protect them against infections and it is highly recommended that you have a vet administer hyper-immune plasma to your foal to help protect them against infections until they are 6-8 weeks when they start to develop their own immune system.