

The pregnant mare

Springtime is when the sound of little feet is heard once again. Gestation of the mare can be from 320 to 370 days, but most foal around 334 days. It is important not to make too many changes for the mare at once. She will need to be where she is due to foal about a month before so she can settle in to the new surroundings. If she is staying at home ensure she has a larger stable for foaling and a small paddock for when they are ready to be turned out together. The paddock must have safe fencing, don't forget foals are inquisitive and have small feet! They will also need a field shelter. A month before foaling gradually add in a stud mix for the mare, continue feeding good quality hay ad lib. Once she has foaled the mare will need increased feed and water to produce good quality milk for the foal.

You will notice your mares shape changing as she gets closer to foaling, the depression in the flank will fill out. The udder will also start to fill out, although this is usually more noticeable in mares who have had foals before. Just before foaling you may notice a 'waxy' appearance to the teats or even milk dripping out.

You may not get to see the foaling unless your mare is very comfortable around people, they will wait until you leave, so regular checks are often better than sitting with a mare that is getting stressed with your presence. There are many foaling alarms or CCTV that you can use to monitor from afar. When labour and subsequently contractions start the mare will appear restless and may show signs of colic, the next stage is the birth of the foal. If there are any complications during foaling please do not hesitate to call us. Once your mare has foaled, check the placenta has all been passed, and save it for a vet to check. The foal should be standing within an hour, suckling within 2 hours and passed muconium (the first faeces, which are very dark in colour) within the first 24 hours. The mare should have passed the afterbirth within 6 hours. Ensure the foal's navel is dressed with iodine or hibitane to reduce the chance of an infection. It is important to check your mare has milk and that the foal is suckling so they receive colostrum. The colostrum is very rich and contains antibodies essential to protect the within the first few months of life, however, these antibodies can only be absorbed for 12-24 hours after foaling. If you are unsure of how much colostrum your foal has received a blood sample can be taken to check their immunity.

We recommend a foal health check the next day, we can also check the mare and ensure all the afterbirth has been passed. Retention of the afterbirth can lead to infections and problems with fertility in the future.

If your mare has not been vaccinated for tetanus recently, we recommend a booster one month before foaling to ensure your foal has adequate tetanus protection. If your mare has not been treated against internal parasites then ensure you use a product licensed for use in pregnant and lactating foals such as Equimax.