



ROSSDALES
VETERINARY SURGEONS

THE NEWBORN FOAL

It's important to monitor carefully the first few hours of a healthy newborn foal and to recognise any problems at an early stage. We've compiled some useful facts about the newborn foal and indicated when you should seek veterinary assistance.

The first few hours

Sit, suck, stand and search

- Within seconds the foal should right itself and **sit** in sternal.
- After 15–30 minutes the **suck** reflex should be present and foal should be alert and active.
- After 30 minutes the foal should start to thrust front legs forward and attempt to **stand** – may be awkward and fall frequently so ensure good deep bedding – preferably straw.
- **1 hour**
Between 30–60 minutes foal should stand successfully and start to **search** for udder under mare's abdomen.
- **2 hours**
Successfully nurse 5–7 times an hour.
- **4 hours**
Foal should have passed dark meconium, followed by soft, pale yellow milk faeces.
- **12 hours**
Within 6–12 hours the foal should have urinated.
- **12–36 hours**
Vet check, tetanus antitoxin and blood test for IgG.



Checklist

- ✓ Leave umbilicus attached as long as possible to allow blood from the placenta to pass back in to the foal. Spray broken umbilical cord with diluted iodine solution right at the stump.
- ✓ Mare will start to lick the foal and if she is a first time dam she may be quite protective. If particularly cold then drying the foal with warm towels may be necessary.
- ✓ Can assist mare and foal with nursing but the foal will usually succeed and this is part of the bonding process.

Foaling Kit Box Contents

- Tail bandage for the mare
- Clean buckets for water
- Coveralls for yourself – it can be a messy job!
- Diluted (1%) iodine or chlorhexidine solution (in a spray bottle for ease of use)
- Scissors
- Towels to dry foal

When to call for help

The foal is a prey species and will be up and running within a couple of hours. However, they are also quite vulnerable and may require immediate veterinary intervention if:

- The foal cannot be roused immediately at birth, or goes quiet after initial activity.
- The foal is unable to stand and nurse – legs might be contracted or foal may not have coordination to do so.
- The foal has no suck reflex after 2 hours. Foals require colostrum within the first 6 hours for immunity and have limited energy stores
- Milk is seen coming out of the nostrils – this may be associated with a cleft palate or laryngeal insufficiency
- No meconium (dark faeces) seen after 6 hours, colts are particularly prone to this and may present with signs of colic or straining while they are trying to pass hard faeces
- Mare will not allow the foal to nurse or has no milk
- Mare has not passed the placenta (fetal membranes) within 3 hours

Even after the first examination by your vet, the young foal will still require careful monitoring:

- The umbilicus should be dry after the first day, if urine is seen dribbling from the umbilical stump then the urachus may have re-opened. This can be a portal of entry for infection.
- The foal is susceptible to infection in the bloodstream. The first sign of this is often a reduced activity level or decreased nursing from the mare. Any signs of lethargy, reluctance to get up and nurse or unusual behaviour should be investigated. Infection can also settle in the foals' joints and any lameness should be examined immediately.
- Hernias can develop around the umbilicus that are generally non-painful and reducible but may require correction. Colt foals may also have a hernia seen as a swelling in the groin area.
- Foals are often born with weak or bent legs. The tendons and ligaments of the legs can often be too slack or tight, or there is uneven growth of the bone, but these tend to improve dramatically in the first two weeks.

Promoting immunity

The foal is born with a less effective immune system and must receive all antibodies from the mare's colostrum. Keeping up to date with the mare's vaccinations will ensure they are both protected and administration of Tetanus antitoxin to the newborn foal is recommended.

Cleanliness is paramount to reduce spread of disease and the mare and foal should be kept away from other horses in the first couple of days.

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