

## SHARIN HALL – Standing ‘FAMOUS DASH TA VEGAS’

### FOALING

Q: How long is gestation?

A: 345 days

Q: How should I feed my mare and how much during the first 2 trimesters?

A: The first trimester of your mare’s pregnancy starts on the day of conception and ends at day 113. To ensure that your mare maintains a healthy weight, she can be maintained on high-quality forage, pasture or hay and unlimited access to a mineral salt block. If she’s a ‘hard-keeper’, supplementing with a concentrated feed and keeping her ‘stomach ph balanced’ will help to maintain her body condition score and digestive integrity. During this 1<sup>st</sup> trimester, best practices dictate that she not receive vaccinations in this periods of time. It is, however, recommended that she be dewormed sometime between 60-90 days.

Q: What do I do with my mare going into her 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester?

A: Due to the rapid growth of the fetus towards the latter part of the pregnancy, the nutritional needs of your mare will increase by about 30%. It is imperative to concentrate on vital nutrients, vitamins and mineral content of her feed – this is so much more important than just calories. During this third and final stage of pregnancy, your mare will need to receive the most important set of vaccinations, known as ‘pre-foaling’ vaccinations. These vaccinations are primarily for establishing a solid immune system in the foal, however, the mare certainly benefits from these vaccinations as well. The administration of these vaccines during this time will help ensure that your mare produces high levels of antibodies that will provide the immunity-boosting building blocks of her colostrum. Offer mineral block or lick tub for any deficiency.

Q: Do all mares show the same signs?

A: No, every mare is different, but most rules apply.

Q: What signs should I look for prior to foaling?

A: Within the last day or two before foaling, the mare’s vulva will swell. Teats may fill and accumulate with small beads of Wax. Some mares will not wax. When labor begins the mare may show the same signs of colic by being restless, kicking at the belly, looking at the flanks and seeming to be irritable or anxious.

Q: What do I do if a mare does not give noticeable signs?

A: Monitor them closely. Mares prefer privacy at foaling time. If possible, mares will delay birth until human observers are not around. Mares generally foal at night. One study, for example, indicated that approximately 80% of foals were born between midnight and 6 a.m.

Q: What should I do to prepare for foaling and how long prior to her foaling date should I start? (consider cold & warm weather)

A: 4-6 weeks prep

- **Prepare the foaling stall** and move your mare in at least four weeks before she’s due so she can relax and allow her immune system to build up antibodies to unfamiliar organisms in the stall. I bed the stall with 2-3 bales of straw or an abundant amount of shavings depending on your location. When she’s about to foal, I refresh the straw or shavings right before foaling.
- **Set up a heat lamp** if your climate is cold. Check that the lamp is free of dust and cobwebs (fire hazards) and ensure that the cord and plug are in good condition and out of reach of horses.

- **Monitor your mare.** Because foaling happens quickly once it begins, you need to observe her almost constantly, consider installing a video camera in the stall or investing in a foal alert device.

Q: Will a mare always bag up?

A: No but they can appear anywhere between 12-36 hours before foaling or a week or two before foaling. It does not occur in some mares so is not a reliable method of predicting foaling occurrence.

Q: How long should she go past her foaling date? What is safe and should I call a vet if she goes over too many days? Do mares normally foal early? Or late?

A: The average duration of gestation is anywhere between 320-370 days. Foaling days after 370 days of gestation are not uncommon and usually do not represent a problem.

- The longest live foal delivery on record is 445 days!
- Foals born after a prolonged gestation are often small in size as a result of a delayed uterine development period, and rarely present foaling problems as a result of 'having grown too much.'

The statistics show that over 20% of pregnancies were greater than 371 days in duration is somewhat outside the normal statistical statement that the average gestational duration in the equine is 320-371.

Q: When my mare starts the foaling process, how long should it take? What should I look for? What can go wrong with both the mare & foal during the foaling process?

A: There are three stages of parturition. In stage one the mare will show signs of physical discomfort. She will exhibit signs similar to colic. She may act restless by lying down and getting up repeatedly. Additionally, she may walk her stall in an anxious or nervous manner. She may break out into a sweat in her flank area and behind her elbows. Furthermore, she may look at, bite at, or kick at her sides. She may hold her tail in an elevated position or do a lot of tail swishing. Frequent urination or defecation is also common. In stage one, the mare's cervix is dilating, and the foal is turning to get into the proper position for birth. Stage one can last for a few minutes to several hours. The mare has the ability to prolong stage one if she does not feel safe and secure. Wrap her tail to prevent infection. Remove after foaling. More than 70% of mares foal between 10:00 pm and 2:00 am because there is typically less activity in their surroundings during that time. As experienced foaling attendants know, mares can and often do put off foaling until no one is watching.

Q: Should I call a vet once she starts to foal?

A: If you are inexperienced or not comfortable during foaling, I suggest hiring a foaling attendant, installing a video monitor or using a birth alarm system. This can save the life of the foal if a problem should arise. It is advisable to have your veterinarian's phone number nearby in case of an emergency.

### **A Note of Caution**

Owners or managers may want to predict when a mare will deliver so personnel can observe the delivery and intervene if necessary. There may be health implications to the mare if the collection of mammary secretions results in mastitis (infection of the mammary gland). Stimulation of the mammary gland may also result in milk letdown in the udder and subsequent loss of colostrum. Although these risks are uncommon, they should be considered when developing management.

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