

# Ask A Vet: Foaling Tips

*Sunday, May 25, 2014*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

Our mare is pregnant and is due in the next few weeks. She has never had a foal before and we have never been present for a foaling. What should we expect and is there anything that we need to do after the foal is born?

Dear Horse-owner,

This is quite an exciting time for you and the mare. Foaling can be a slightly stressful, but amazing event. There are a couple of guidelines to follow and things to watch for when she is due. When she gets close, usually her udder will fill moderately and she will "wax up". Waxing is the appearance of a waxy substance on the ends of the teats. Usually when that happens, she will go into labor within 48 hours. There are commercial kits that can be purchased that will let you test her milk and give you a narrower range of when she will be due.

**Stage 1 labor** consists of minor contractions and positioning of the foal into the birth canal. Some mares can act mildly colicky during that time; as if she cannot get comfortable.

**Stage 2 labor** begins with rupture of the amnionic sac and birth of the foal. Often after rupturing, 2 feet are immediately visible. The mare may stand and lay down during this process. Stage 2 labor and the birth of the full foal should only take 1 hour or less.

**Stage 3 labor** is passing of the afterbirth. This process should happen within 3 hours after the foal is born. If not, it is vital to contact your veterinarian immediately as the mare can become quite sick if she retains the placenta for a long period of time.

Once the foal is born and the mare has a chance to smell it, you can dry the foal off with towels and dip the end of the umbilicus (belly button) with iodine. Check the foal for any cuts and that all of the limbs are straight with no obvious fractures or swollen joints.

My 1-2-3 rule (and a main take home message) is that the foal should be born within 1 hour of full contractions by the mare, the foal should stand and nurse within 2 hours, and the mare should pass the placenta within 3 hours. I usually tell clients to set a timer when they see the mare foaling (if possible). Call your veterinarian if any of those stages go beyond the 1-2-3 limit.

It is advised to have your foal checked by a veterinarian within 24-48 hours of a foal being born. We will check the umbilicus, examine the ribs for any fractures, and the health of the joints. These are some quick and simple rules for foaling. For a more complete list, or things to watch for, contact your veterinarian.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman