

Ask A Vet: Puppies on the Way-Here's What to Expect

Sunday, March 15, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

Our 3 year old female dog got out while in-heat and we found her with a male. We are going to have the puppies, and then get her spayed. We've never had a pregnant dog and don't know what expect or how long this will take, etc.

Dear Pet-owner,

First, the average length of gestation in dogs is 63 days, but can sometimes go 64-66 days. For diagnosis of the pregnancy, schedule several appointments with your veterinarian. First, at 20-25 days post-breeding your veterinarian can perform an ultrasound to look for puppies. We look for movement of the puppies and we watch their hearts beat. A follow-up appointment is recommended between day 50 and 60 to take an x-ray. At that point, the puppies' skeletons have formed and we can count to see how many puppies are present, which is very helpful when you are delivering puppies to know how many to expect. After the 20 day appointment, most veterinarians suggest transitioning the dog onto a puppy food to add more calories and calcium to her diet. Most pregnant dogs will "nest" during the last few days of gestation; meaning they will make a bed in a darker and safe area of the house.

During the last week of gestation, you should check your dog's temperature daily. A normal pregnant dog's rectal temperature is 101-102°F. Around 24 hours before she goes into labor, her body temperature will drop to around 99°F. Everyone needs to remain calm and quiet during this time. She will not progress into full labor if she is not comfortable. When she goes into labor, she'll lie in her nest and breathe heavily with abdominal contractions. Within an hour of obvious labor you should see a fluid sac appear, followed by a puppy. Sometimes there can be an hour between puppies, but frequently dogs progress rather quickly. Help her by drying the puppies with warm towels. You can use a baby bulb syringe to gently suck fluid from the puppy's nose, and then lay the puppy somewhere safe, but near mom. Depending on the number of puppies, some dogs will need to drink water or go outside to potty. Keep an eye on her and give her what she needs.

Times to call your veterinarian include: no signs of labor 24 hours after a temperature drop, more than 2 hours between puppies, a foul smelling or severely bloody discharge from the dog, obvious signs of straining or pain in the dog. In general, be in touch with your veterinarian during the process and he/she can often talk you through it.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman