

Ask A Vet: Start Planning Now for Equine Breeding Program

Sunday, January 10, 2016

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We are thinking of breeding our mare this spring. What should we do beforehand in order to be ready to take her to the stallion?

Dear Reader,

The first thing to do may be to decide when you want the foal to be born next year. Mares have a gestational length of approximately 11 months, depending on the breed. This 11 months is an estimate. Some mares will foal a few weeks before that or as much as 4 weeks after. So if your mare is bred in May (and conceives) she will most likely foal in April. Weather can play a big role in your decision. Foals born early in the year (January or February) will need a warm box stall and plenty of attention the first few days due to the cold. In the warmer months, mares can give birth outside comfortably. Another point to consider is that mares do not always get pregnant on the first heat cycle. Beginning to breed earlier in the year can allow you another chance at breeding her before it gets too late.

For the non-pregnant mare, many breeding farms will require a negative uterine culture before beginning the actual breeding. A uterine culture is a sample of the uterus gathered by passing a sterile swab through the cervix and into the uterus. This swab is then submitted for laboratory analysis to determine if there is any infection within the uterus. Preferably this is done while the mare is in heat since at this time her cervix is open and the uterus contains more fluid to be sampled.

For mares that are already pregnant, a uterine culture is unnecessary and impractical. However, after the foal is born, make sure that she expels her placenta within three hours of giving birth. Placentas that are retained in the mare for longer than that can lead to infection within the uterus. This infection will prevent her from becoming pregnant and may even make her sick. If this happens, seek advice from your veterinarian immediately.

Whether pregnant or not, be aware of your mares body condition score (BCS). This is a measure of how much fat she has over her ribs and top line. A mare's BCS can influence their fertility. Mares that are too heavy have a more difficult time getting pregnant as well as giving birth once that time comes. Mares that are too thin generally are hard to get in foal. Ideal body condition scores are a five or six out of a possible ten. If you have questions about your potential momma, ask your veterinarian to score her for you.

Getting mares pregnant can sometimes be a frustrating endeavor, but with some research and a little advance planning, you can help raise the odds of a successful breeding season.

-Dr. Wade Hammond