

Give foals the best start by looking after mum

WHEN preparing a mare for foaling, the aim is to provide the right conditions for the healthy development of a viable foal.

The needs of the mare should be carefully considered at the same time to ensure that she is in the best state to carry the foal to term and then go on to nurse the foal and breed again at the appropriate time.

Should the feeding change towards the end of pregnancy?

The nutritional needs of the mare and foal change dramatically in late pregnancy.

As the foal increases in size, the space available for digestion of bulky roughage is reduced. This means for many mares that additional, concentrated feed should be provided.

The proprietary mare and foal mixes are well balanced feeds designed specifically for this job and the packaging comes with a detailed guide for feeding.

The major feed suppliers also have an excellent nutrition

EQUINE VET

Paul May, of the Paragon Veterinary Group based at Newbiggin, near Penrith, on how to prepare a mare for foaling

advice service available.

When should my mare be vaccinated?

Tetanus is a risk to the mare and foal. A booster vaccination should be given one to two months before foaling to maximise protection for the mare if she suffers any damage at foaling and the foal by ensuring good antibody levels in colostrum. We will often also recommend a dose of tetanus antitoxin administered soon after birth.

Your vet may well advise other booster vaccinations to be given in late pregnancy to protect against diseases such as flu, strangles and herpes virus. Herpes virus vaccination is given in the final third of pregnancy as an aid to prevent premature loss of the foal.

Is running milk a good sign that the birth is imminent?

Mares will bag up during the final month of pregnancy; a minority show very few signs in the udder until the last few days.

As foaling draws close (usually in the last 24 hours) they will wax up with a bead of sticky colostrum appearing at the end of the teats. Around a quarter of mares will run milk before they foal and this can be seen sticking to their hind legs.

If the mare has run milk for more than three days, the vital colostrum will be depleted. It will then be necessary to blood test the foal once it is over 24 hours old to check its antibody level. These antibodies have to protect the foal for the first three months of life and if the level is not high enough there are serious risks to the foal's health. Plasma given to these foals will greatly improve their protection against disease.

When is the best time to move a mare in late pregnancy?

Ideally broodmares should be settled into the premises where they will foal at least a month before foaling so that the colostrum will contain specific protection against these challenges.



BIRTH RIGHT: your mare needs to be in tip-top condition in late pregnancy

Foaling indoors

If broodmares are to foal indoors there are some important considerations to take into account. The foaling box should be large enough and should be in a quiet place with adequate shelter and lighting.

All dangerous objects should be removed from the box and straw should be used as bedding as it is least likely to stick to the

foal or build up in its mouth.

What help is there for monitoring the broodmare around the time of foaling?

There are monitors available, the most useful are those that combine sound and vision as they do allow a little more independence and allow you to close your eyes!

Once it is clear that foaling is

imminent it is advisable to remove any rugs from the mare and to wrap up her tail.

If there is time and she is not agitated, washing down under her tail will help with hygiene. Ensure that there is plenty of deep bedding and remove all droppings and wet bedding from the box. Your vet can help you put together a foaling first aid kit to keep nearby.



SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME: a mare and her foal

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