



4747 SW 60<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Ocala, Florida 34474  
Tel: (352) 237-6151  
Fax (352) 237-0629  
E-mail: PSEH@petersonsmith.com

J.L. Peterson, D.V.M.  
P.M. Matthews, D.V.M.  
J.K. Hahn, D.V.M.  
D.E. Slone, D.V.M.  
W.B. Russell, D.V.M.  
F.E. Hughes, D.V.M.  
A.B. Riggs, D.V.M.  
C.K. Clark, D.V.M.

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R.D. Rood, D.V.M.  
A.S. Cayot, D.V.M.  
T.M. Lynch, D.V.M.  
M.D. Hope, D.V.M.  
N.R. Mitts, D.V.M.

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*A Tradition of Leadership and Excellence in Equine Medicine*

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## Foaling newsletter

Carol K. Clark, D.V.M., Diplomate, A.C.V.S.

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This newsletter of foaling and neonatal foal care will provide a brief overview to prepare you for the season. During your foal's first day, critical events must occur that will affect your foal's chances of survival and long-term well-being. The majority of foals are born healthy but those that are compromised need **rapid intervention**. The following information should help you know what is normal and when to call for assistance.

#### Events prior to birth that can cause sick foals

Any maternal illness should raise the suspicion of placental dysfunction and fetal compromise. Colic and laminitis (founder) are two such examples. Premature udder development, milk dripping from the udder, or a vaginal discharge, are definite abnormalities in the mare and may indicate an inflammation of the placenta. Consult with your veterinarian if any of these signs are seen. Premature delivery (less than 320 days gestation), prolonged gestation, and failure to develop an udder can also predispose the foal to illness. Early intervention can prevent or minimize the negative effects on the fetus.

#### Birthing events

The mare should carry her foal at least 320 days. When the mare appears close to foaling (relaxed pelvic ligaments, elongation of the vulva, waxed teats) she should be observed frequently. Attended foalings are the best way to identify problems at the earliest opportunity. The mare should be clean (especially her hind end and udder areas) and should foal in a clean environment. Once the milky-translucent membranes (amnion) are seen, the foal should be born within 30 minutes. If a red velvety bag is seen first, this is ABNORMAL and requires immediate help. The red bag is actually the placenta, which has detached prematurely and therefore the foal is suffering from a lack of oxygen. The bag must be opened and the foal removed as quickly as possible. These foals need special veterinary attention after being born. If the mare appears to be having contractions with no foal appearing by 20 minutes, call your veterinarian immediately. The foal may be malpositioned and time is critical.

### Events at delivery that can cause sick foals

If abnormal events occur at foaling but are addressed medically, we may prevent further illness. Most of these problems cause a lack of oxygen delivery to the foal just before, during or immediately after the birth and result in what is termed peripartum asphyxia. This syndrome is quite common and causes organs such as the brain and gastrointestinal system to malfunction due to oxygen deprivation. "Dummy foals" are an example of this illness. Dystocia (inability of the mare to deliver the foal usually because of malpositioning), meconium staining of the foal or fetal fluids, or premature placental separation ("red bag" delivery) are events associated with compromised foals. Examination of the placenta is very important for reasons that relate to the health of the mare AND the foal. The placenta should be spread out to check for completeness and to look for abnormal areas (these are seen on the red velvety side). The placenta should weigh approximately 10% of the foal's body weight. Heavy placentas or abnormal appearing placentas should be saved for veterinary inspection.