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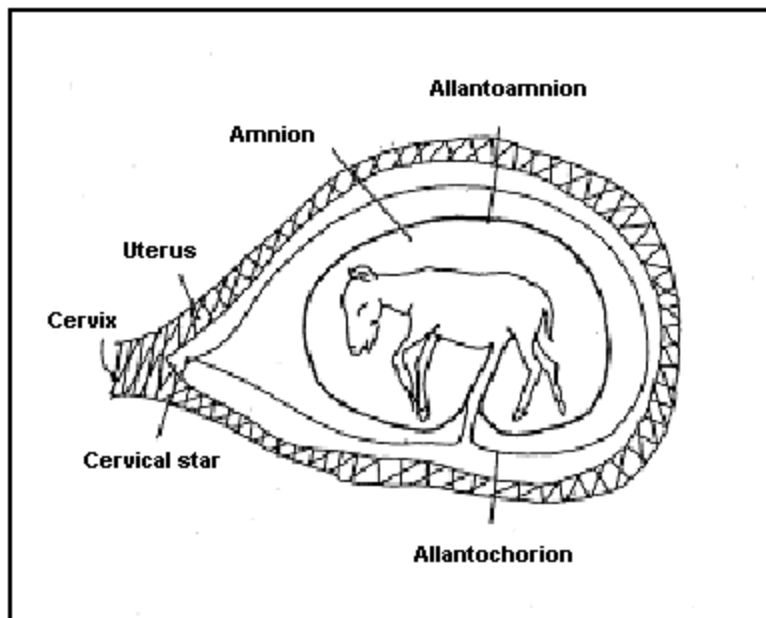
A Tradition of Leadership and Excellence in Equine Medicine

The red bag foal
Jacqueline T. Linkous, MRCVS

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Well, the end of another year is upon us and, with that, another breeding season approaches. As many of us prepare for the happy and hectic arrival of this year's foal crop. I would like to take a moment to discuss a rare but very important foaling problem – red bag.

The mature placenta consists of the fetus, the fetal membranes, and the maternal components, all of which function as one unit. The fetal membranes can be discussed in terms of three groups. First is the allantochorion, second is the allantoamnion, and third is the umbilical cord. The diagram below illustrates their relationship to the fetus and to one another.



During the normal foaling process, rupture of the allantochorion at the cervical star allows the fetus to pass through the birth canal with the amnion intact around it. This places tension on the inner side of the allantochorion, causing it to be delivered inner side first. That inner side is the normal bluish placental tissue that you see which is delivered after the foal is delivered.

Red bag is the term used to describe premature placental separation. A red bag occurs when the allantochorion fails to rupture at the cervical star and the mare attempts to deliver the fetus and the placenta all in one go. What you see at the mare's vulva is the outer side of the allantochorion, which looks like a red, velvety, volleyball-sized mass. The thing to remember when you see this is that the foal is

not getting enough oxygen, and every minute is critical. You must immediately break that bag by any means necessary and work on getting the foal out. Once you have done that, give your veterinarian a call and inform them of the situation, but don't waste precious time calling first. With any luck you won't encounter this problem, but at least you will know how to handle it if you do.

On a lighter note, I would like to take a moment to wish everyone a safe, happy, and prosperous New Year on behalf of everyone at Peterson & Smith. In these uncertain times, we are striving to provide the most reliable and friendly service we possible can. We are here to help in any way possible, so don't hesitate to ask. We look forward to seeing you (and your new foals) in 2002.