

Each spring, foaling season is underway. It is a good time to go over some of the important aspects of pregnant mares, foaling and how to deal with any of the bumps along the way.

### How Long Does a Mare Carry a Foal?

There is always debate around the coffee table about how long a mare is supposed to carry a foal? The answer is not as easy as one would suspect. Typically, a mare carries her foal until about 335 days from the time of breeding – roughly 11 months. The range can be anywhere from 320-365 days. Usually the younger mares will hold

on a little while longer than a mare that has had many foals but each horse is individual and their owners can tell you that they all have their own timeline.

### How Do You Know When She is About to Foal?

For most mares, there are some specific signs that will become evident. Mares will start to relax the pelvic muscles and muscles around the tail head. This can be assessed by feeling those muscles around the tail head. Most mares will also produce a small amount of discharge from each teat on the udder about 48 hours before the big day – this is called “waxing”. As the time approaches for foaling, mares will also isolate themselves and may nest.



Most mares will produce a foal within about 15 minutes from the time labor begins. Many owners have been frustrated to find that they watch their mare all night and then leave for a coffee for 10 minutes, only to find a healthy, bouncy foal upon return. The rapidity and secretiveness of the foaling is an instinctual behavior to help avoid predators during her most vulnerable time.

### What's Next?

With the foal born and mare recovering, here are some general guidelines to follow:

- The foal should be up on its feet within about 20-40 minutes from birth.
- The foal should be attempting to suckle from the mare within 60 minutes.
- The mare should produce (or 'clean') her placenta within 6 hours of foaling.

Foals are not calves when it comes to birthing. Some of us grew up with the experience of calving beef calves and how you can pull the calves when the heifer/cow has trouble. This is not the case for horses.

**Do not pull foals without contacting your veterinarian.**

**Mares generally do not need any help foaling. If they do, it is a major emergency and attempts to gain a live foal can be diminished if prompt and appropriate veterinary intervention is not provided.**



*Dr. Chris Bell BSc, DVM, MVetSc  
Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons  
Equine Surgery, Lameness and Sports Medicine Surgeon  
and Practice Owner Elders Equine Veterinary Service*