

Points on Pets: Should mares be induced for planned delivery?

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Our daughter's mare is due to foal in about two weeks. Because we want to observe the foaling, we are wondering if we can have the mare induced just like it is done in women. That way we would know which day to stay home from work and which day to allow our daughter to stay home from school.

We have been told by our friends that unless we have our mare induced, we will miss the foaling.

A: Many equine veterinarians routinely induce foaling in mares by administering appropriate drugs. Considerations for inducing mares to foal usually include the length of the pregnancy as determined from the last known breeding, the amount of milk in the udder and the degree of genital tract relaxation.

It is extremely important to know the exact conception date and to know that the length of normal pregnancies in mares can vary considerably. In fact, it is normal for some mares to carry their foals a full calendar year. Therefore, before inducing your mare, your veterinarian will have to do a thorough physical examination to determine that she is ready.

Most veterinarians do not induce mares to foal prior to 330 days of pregnancy. Foals delivered prior to this time are usually weak and often do not survive, even with excellent nursing care. Prior to inducement, the udder should be well developed and contain colostrum, which is also called first milk. It is important that each newborn foal get an adequate feeding of the mare's first milk, which contains antibodies that are protective against common foal diseases.

Most veterinarians will not induce a mare to foal unless her cervix, the exterior opening to the uterus, is relaxed. Veterinarians determine the degree of relaxation by looking at it through an instrument called a vaginal speculum or by manually feeling it with his or her fingers while the hand is inserted into the vaginal vault.

After examining your mare, your veterinarian can give you advice regarding whether or not induction of your mare is a good idea. It is important to remember that anything that can go wrong during a normal foaling can also occur during an induced foaling.

After the induction drugs are given, most mares foal within 30 to 40 minutes. Since the foaling process occurs rapidly and corrective procedures for problems must be done quickly if needed, only experienced equine veterinarians should be asked to induce mares.

Q: Although very surprising to our friends, our cat likes to get into water in our bathtub. Therefore, we are wondering if it is OK to use shampoo on our cat. We would like to take advantage of this quirk and have a clean cat. We never bathed our previous cats because they hated water.

A: You should only use shampoos made and tested for cats. This is important, especially if using medicated shampoos or shampoos containing insecticides.

Shampoos made for dogs should generally not be used on cats. Household products such as dish-washing detergents should never be used on cats.

Your veterinarian can help you identify an appropriate shampoo for your cat. You are fortunate to have a cat that enjoys being in water.

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