

# FOAL MANAGEMENT

The birth of a foal is a highly anticipated event for many horse owners. Horse producers face many decisions that require them to understand the foaling process and the needs of newborn foals. A live, healthy foal represents the investment of considerable time, money and effort. These tips should help you deliver a healthy foal:

- Reduce exposure to bacteria by providing a dry, draft-free stall.
- Completely sanitize feeding equipment daily.
- Sanitize and disinfect the foal stall and bed it with clean bedding prior to the foal's birth.
- The foaling stall should also be cleaned regularly after the foal is born to help reduce bacterial and viral disease and ammonia levels.
- A high level of ammonia is cause of foal pneumonia.
- Dip navel in iodine immediately after birth to prevent the invasion of bacteria.

Orphan foals take even more care and management and will need to be fed a milk replacer. When we talk about feeding an orphaned foal, we don't just mean those who have lost their mother. The mare may be present but too little milk is being produced. The most critical time for these newborns is the first few days of life. These tips will help ensure the success of a newborn foal:

- The foal should be able to sit up on its chest within minutes of birth.
- Mucous membranes should be red or pink.
- It should be breathing easily within 15 minutes and have a suckling reflex within 20 minutes, at the maximum.
- The foal should be able to stand within 20-30 minutes and nurse within 1 hour or less after birth. And it should be alert and recognize its mother.
- A veterinarian check of the mare and foal is suggested 12 hours after birth. The veterinarian will check the mare's general condition and do a worm check to prevent further contamination of the foal's environment. The foal will also be given a general check for color, cleft palate, heart, legs suckling reflex, and condition of the naval stump.

Colostrum is also an important part of caring for a newborn foal. Be sure the foal consumes high quality colostrum within 2 hours of birth. Getting the colostrum into the foal as soon as possible is crucial for its survival. A foal is only able to absorb colostrum during the first 24-36 hours after birth. Here are some other colostrum management tips:

- The better the colostrum quality, the better the chances for survival. Use a colostrometer to measure the colostrum quality.
- If a mare dies giving birth, has no milk, or if her colostrum registers low, you can use high quality colostrum that has been taken from other mares and frozen.

- Frozen colostrum has to be stored in plastic containers, like freezer bags, and not in glass containers. That's because the antibodies stick to the glass. If it's frozen in plastic, colostrum can be stored for over a year and still be effective.
- When you thaw colostrum, do it at room temperature; do not microwave it or boil it. The colostrum can lose its value to the foal. Use a colostrometer to recheck the reading after it thaws.
- If you don't have any colostrum available or it registers less than 1.065, colostrum banks are set up in some states to help you. For more information, contact your local veterinarian or a local university animal science department.
- The foal should be standing up when it drinks colostrum, whether from its mother, its nurse mare, or a plastic bottle.
- If the foal can't suckle, a stomach tube might be needed. The procedure is very delicate and if done wrong could be fatal. A veterinarian should be contacted to do the procedure. A blood test can be taken at 12 hours of age to know for sure if the antibodies have been absorbed. If you can't get colostrum into the foal, ask the veterinarian for help.

Teaching the foal to drink from a bucket is the next important step. Bottles are difficult to clean and are a source of bacteria. They should be avoided. A clean bucket is the best choice. Dip your fingers in the milk replacer and let the foal suck two of your fingers so it gets the taste of the milk replacer and starts the sucking action. Slowly bring the bucket of milk replacer up to the foal and let it discover the milk replacer on its own. Don't force it. Soon it will be feeding itself. Any unused milk replacer not consumed after several hours should be discarded.