

Prenatal Planning

by NWHs

Mare and foal care advice from Dr. Wendy Vaala, Senior Equine Technical Services Specialist for Intervet



From simple checklists to online calculators, breeding calendars offer broodmare owners a way to ensure the best care for their expecting mares and newborn foals. Sometimes, however, the sheer amount of information available can be overwhelming, especially when not all sources agree.

How often should the mare be dewormed? Which vaccinations should be given or avoided? What are the warning signs of problems?

Whether expecting your first foal or your fiftieth, these questions need answers. For the most current information, we spoke to Dr. Wendy Vaala of Intervet. As a veterinarian who has started numerous mare and foal programs, Dr. Vaala believes that pregnant mare care begins well before the mare is actually bred.

“Be sure she’s in a good level of nutrition—rising weight, routine dental and foot care taken care of, and with few drugs in her system at the time of breeding,” says Vaala. “The one vaccine that is important for pre-breeding is rabies. It has enduring antibody titers, so it’s best to vaccinate before the mare is bred, then you don’t need another booster before foaling.”

Also important, especially for mares approaching their first breeding, older mares, or mares who have had difficult pregnancies/foaling in the past, is a breeding soundness exam. This can include an ultrasound, uterine culture, and (especially for problem or older mares) a uterine biopsy.

Protection and Prevention

Deworming should be done at least once per trimester. “Really work with your veterinarian,” says Vaala. “On farms with multiple horses, do fecal exams and find the high shedders. In most cases, 20% of the horses tend to shed 80% of the parasites. Concentrate on those horses and use only the dewormers you need to get the job done. Take a smart approach and work with your vet to tailor a rotation program to parasites prevalent in your area. One farm can be very different from the farm down the road.”

“There is nothing that beats constant surveillance.”

Dr. Vaala encourages instituting a 21-28 day quarantine program to protect broodmares from newcomers. “Would a pregnant woman walk into a nursery full of sick kids? Probably not. The same goes for horses. Keep your broodmares separated from the youngsters on your farm.”

As part of this quarantine program:

- Have a fecal exam done on all new horses
- Keep other horses away from nose-to-nose contact with mares
- Keep young horses well away from the broodmares

The First Trimester

- Have a vet check the mare during days 14-16 and 25-30 to determine pregnancy and rule out twins. If the foal must be aborted for any reason, this is the time to do it. After day 30, the mare may not cycle back quickly after aborting.
- Deworm once.
- Avoid unnecessary medications before day 60-90—this is when fetal organs are forming and the effects of drugs on this process aren’t fully understood.
- If the mare is older or has had problems in the past, measure progesterone levels. If necessary, your vet can recommend a supplement.

The Second Trimester

- Vaccinate for EHV-1 in months 5, 7, and 9 of the pregnancy (some medications recommend month 3, too, so consult your vet). EHV-1 is the leading cause of viral abortion, especially during late pregnancy. Known as the “equine cold sore,” the

disease is ubiquitous in horse population, and chances are the mare is infected.

- Deworm once.
- Maintain a steady plane of nutrition.
- Consult your vet about any vaccinations and potential risks specific to your area.

The Third Trimester

- Continue your EHV-1 program to stimulate the highest antibody titer possible going into the third trimester.
- Deworm once.
- Increase the mare's nutrition. Commercial broodmare feeds are recommended because they take into account all of the mare's special needs. Just increasing feed isn't sufficient—she simply doesn't have the room in her body for enough food to get the necessary nutrients.
- 4-8 weeks prior to foaling, the mare should receive the rest of her pre-foaling boosters (specific vaccines vary by area). Core vaccines are considered EHV1&4, Influenza, EEE, WEE, Tetanus and WNV (and rabies if not given pre-breeding).
- Watch the mare closely, especially during the last 30 days of pregnancy, in case foaling begins ahead of schedule.
- Check for the formation of the udder. Secretions will go from amber or clear and watery to sticky and thick—a sign the mare is producing the colostrum necessary for the foal's health. If you see signs of leakage, contact your vet.
- Contact your vet if the mare “bags up” prematurely (sudden development of an udder). This may be a sign of an infection or other problems.



Foaling

- “There is nothing that beats constant surveillance,” says Vaala. “The foaling should be over and done in 30-45 minutes. If it goes on longer or if the placenta doesn't pass within 3 hours after foaling, alert your vet.”
- Colostrum absorption occurs mostly within the first 8 hours after birth, and is crucial to the foal's health.

More Resources for the Mare and Foal



The Complete Book of Foaling

by Karen E. N. Hayes, DVM

www.foalcare.com
Intervet's foal care website has detailed breeding calendars and abundant resources for mare owners



- Deworm the mare within 24-48 hours after foaling—strongyloides can be passed through milk, so this is the first deworming.
- Don't forget about the mare's nutrition after foaling. The first two months are draining on the mare since foals drink 20-25% of their body weight in milk per day; keep protein levels up.
- Especially during the first week, peek under the mare and check her udder. If she's milked out, that's a good sign.

A simple guideline for first-time breeders: at 10 minutes, the foal should sit and suckle; at 1 hour, it should stand; at 2 hours, it should be nursing.

A final bit of advice from Dr. Vaala: “Find a vet who *likes* to deal with mares and foals. Foaling is not an easy task, and an important part of foaling is being there when it happens. Plan ahead, and know who to go to if you have a problem.”

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ABOUT WENDY VAALA, VMD, DIP. ACVIN

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A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania veterinary school, Dr. Vaala taught at that university for fifteen years and started the foal unit there, as well as developing a high-risk pregnancy program at the University's New Bolton Center. She also maintained a private practice for nine years specializing in internal medicine, and started several other foal units and mare programs. She is now Senior Equine Technical Services Specialist for Intervet.