

Virginia Equine PLLC

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Imminent Foaling Rules of Thumb

The gestational length for your mare is approximately 340 days. As this day arrives and you both become more uncomfortable, the mare owner typically experiences some degree of uncertainty regarding their mare's eminent foaling status. Nothing can be said to completely dispel this anxiety, but certain parameters can be kept in mind to help you determine what your mare is doing, where she is in the foaling process, and if she and/or her foal is/are experiencing difficulty.

In general, normal foals are commonly delivered as much as 2 weeks before or 4 weeks after their expected foaling date. Various other sources are available that list parameters of mammary development, tail-head architecture, etc., to help you determine how close your mare is to foaling. If your mare gets within 10 days of her expected foaling date and has no appreciable udder development, some treatment may be necessary to ensure that the foal has something to nurse when he/she arrives. Also, if your mare approaches the 1 year mark and has not yet gone into labor, a veterinary consultation and/or examination may be prudent to evaluate the stage of pregnancy or possibly complications.

Mares will commonly lie down, grunt, moan, stretch out her legs, and even experience mild bouts of abdominal pain in late gestation. These signs do not necessarily indicate that your mare is going into labor; however they typically are the product of a large, heavy fetus and its intra-abdominal effects on the mare. For the most part, if your mare has not broken her water, she is not in an active state of delivery. Unless you are there to witness the gush of fluid when your mare's water breaks, the only way that you will know that her water is broken is that you will see whitish membranes protruding from her vulva.

If more than 30 minutes pass after your mare breaks her water and the foal is not completely expelled, you need to contact your veterinarian. If more than 4 hours pass and your foal has not stood, nursed, and has defecated, or your mare has not completely passed her placenta, you should also seek veterinary attention.