

Fact Sheet

Care of the newborn foal

How soon should a newborn foal stand?

If the mare is still lying down, the foal should be moved to her head for her to lick and bond with – the foal should be able to maintain itself on its chest. The mare's licking should stimulate the foal to extend its front legs and after a few failed attempts they should be able to stand within 2 hours of delivery.

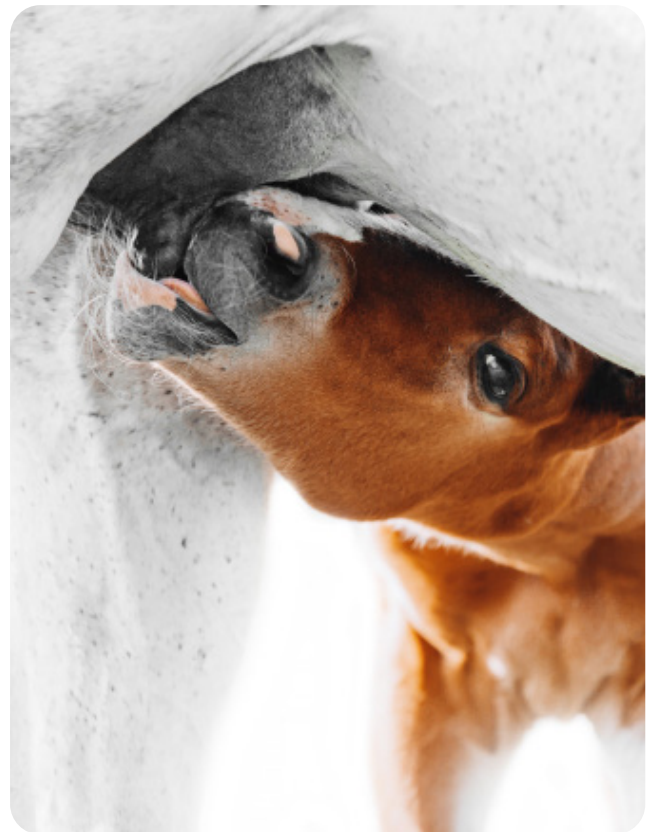


When will the foal have his first drink of milk?

Once standing, foals are very quick to search for milk and they should feed within 4 hours of birth. Most foals have a suckle response immediately after delivery, but it can take several attempts to find the udder and latch on to a teat. Sometimes they may need gentle guidance in the right direction, or the mare may need to be encouraged to stand still. The foal's initial feeds contain the very important colostrum (as long as the mare hasn't been running milk prior to delivery) containing essential components for immunity. It is therefore vital that if the foal has not fed in the first 4 hours of life, veterinary assistance is given – this may be by milking the mare and feeding the foal by stomach tube.

The small intestine's absorption of antibodies (that convey immunity) from the colostrum reduces with time so it is important that they feed within this short window.

A vet can check the foal's immunity levels via a blood test taken when they are over 12 hours old.



How often will the foal feed?

Most foals feed up to 7 times an hour (when they are awake) and gain up to 2Kg of weight daily in their first week of life.

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How often will the foal pass faeces and urine?

When foals first pass faeces it is called meconium and is dark brown/black and very firm. The most common cause of colic in newborn foals is when this material is impacted and it can't be passed easily. If the meconium has not been passed within 8 hours of delivery, or if any colic signs are shown, such as straining with no faeces being produced, veterinary attention should be sought as the foal may need an enema. The faeces will become gradually softer as the foal continues to feed.

Urination should also be observed during the first 8 hours of life.

Normal foal behaviour

Most foals are inquisitive of humans and interact with the mare. An under-developed foal is cause for concern – they often have a domed forehead, low body weight, are weak, have limb deformities and a silky coat. If you are concerned you should contact your vet as soon as possible to discuss the foal and its delivery.

The foal's first vet check

If the vet does not have to attend the delivery, we encourage all owners to have their newborn foal checked before they are 24 hours old. This enables the vet to check that the mare has sufficient milk and that she has not sustained damage during delivery. It is also important that the vet checks that the entire placenta has been delivered, so please save it in a bucket!

Taking a blood sample from the foal will enable the vet to check its immune status – if this is low we may advise a plasma transfusion. During this first clinical examination we will also assess the umbilicus and advise on its care, and check the heart, eyes and limbs.

Administration of tetanus anti-toxin gives short term protection and can be repeated if necessary up to a point when vaccinations can be started, usually from 5-6 months of age.



For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

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