

NEW FOAL TIPS

We at Phillips Equine Clinic are always excited for the start to the year's foaling season and want to make sure that the importance of a veterinary check-up on day one of your baby's life is stressed to all of our clients. We recommend a new foal exam 8-12 hours after delivery if mare and foal are doing well. If you have a new arrival, please call and set up an appointment for later that day or early the next day for a new foal exam. It is always better to prevent a disaster than clean up after one. **If you are having problems with a new foal, or your mare, please do not wait to call.**

The physical exam of the foal includes temperature, pulse and respiration. We also evaluate the oral cavity for a cleft palate, suckle reflex, hydration status and mucous membrane color. An ophthalmic exam is completed and the umbilicus is examined. We listen to the heart and determine if the foal has normal rate and rhythm as well as listening to both sides of the chest for a heart murmur. The lungs are evaluated for early signs of pneumonia as well as determining the respiratory rate. The ribs are palpated for fractures and overall limb conformation is evaluated. If the baby is a colt, then the scrotum is palpated for presence of testicles as well as a scrotal hernia. An enema can be given if the foal has not had a bowel movement. Retained meconium (stool that builds up in the baby's system while in the womb) is the most common cause of colic in young foals.

The mare should also be examined. We look particularly for evidence of vaginal tears, hemorrhage, colic, mastitis and adequate milk. The placenta is carefully examined to make certain that none of it was retained in the mare. A piece of placenta that is missing can alert us to a retained placenta in the mare and then we can take the necessary measures to treat her before she becomes systemically ill. A change in the color or thickness of the placenta can also be an early indication that the foal was compromised by either infection or vascular problem. Please try and remove the placenta from the stall as soon as possible and keep it in a safe place until we can evaluate it.

The last and possibly the most important step is to check the IgG of

the foal. The test is easy and can be done stall-side. A small amount of blood is pulled from the foal and a quick test is run to determine the level of antibodies that were passed from the mare to the foal through the colostrum.

The first milk produced by the mare is called colostrum. It is thicker than normal milk and contains most of the antibodies (disease-fighting proteins) that the foal needs to remain healthy the first several months of life. A foal is born with virtually no immune system of its own, and relies solely on this colostrum for protection. The foal's own immune system will begin to take over after that. It is important that the foal ingest an adequate quantity of good quality colostrum within the first twelve hours of life. If the mare was leaking colostrum prior to delivery, if she had mastitis or no milk for other reasons, or if the foal is unable to nurse, it is important to administer stored colostrum or hyperimmune serum product via stomach tube. A simple blood test for IgG (Imunoglobulins) at one to two days of age will tell us if the foal received adequate colostrum. This test should be run on all foals. If the IgG is low, we can still administer hyperimmune serum intravenously. If you have a mare that is not making colostrum, has leaked colostrum before delivery, or a foal that is not nursing within 2 hours of birth, please call right away. Any of these problems can quickly become life threatening for the foal, and veterinary assistance early in the detection of a problem will mean a good outcome for the new arrival.

We look forward to being a part of the welcoming committee for your new foal. Enjoy the new addition to your equine family!