



FALL BROODMARE EXAMS

Patrick M. McCue

DVM, PhD, Diplomate American College of Theriogenologists

The breeding season is over with on most Quarter Horse farms by the middle of the summer and is completely finished by September. It is understandable that many owners and breeders want to take a break from broodmare work when the season is over. However, mares should not be completely ignored during the late summer and fall months.

It is common practice to examine mares initially 14 to 16 days after breeding for an early pregnancy diagnosis and then re-examine mares periodically until they are 50 to 60 days in foal. These examinations in early pregnancy are prudent because most cases of pregnancy loss occur in the first 60 days of gestation.

A follow-up examination in the late summer or early fall, at approximately 5 months of gestation, is recommended to determine if mares are still in foal or if the pregnancy has been lost. Mares previously determined to be pregnant that are found to be open on the 5 month recheck can be examined further to determine if a cause for the pregnancy loss can be identified. The examination may include a review of the breeding history, a thorough physical evaluation, palpation and ultrasound examination of the entire reproductive tract, speculum examination of the vaginal vault and cervix, collection of culture and cytology specimens from the

uterus and possibly a uterine biopsy. The goal is to identify reproductive problems that may be associated with reduced fertility or a decreased ability to carry a foal to term and correct the issue as soon as possible and not wait until the next breeding season. For example, if a uterine infection is detected, prompt treatment should be initiated which may include uterine lavage, oxytocin administration, infusion of antibiotics into the uterus, and possibly a Caslick's procedure to reduce the risk of recontamination in mares with poor perineal conformation.

Pregnant mares should be housed separately from other horses on the farm, including non-pregnant mares, geldings and show/performance horses, to limit the potential for exposure to infectious diseases that may cause abortion. The infectious agent that has the highest risk for causing abortion in mares is equine herpesvirus type 1 (EHV-1) also known as rhinopneumonitis. There are two killed-virus vaccines available commercially approved for use in healthy mares as an aid in the prevention of abortion due to EHV-1. These are Pneumabort-K[®], produced by Fort Dodge Animal Health, and Prodigy[®], produced by Intervet, Inc. Pregnant mares are at greatest risk of abortion if exposed to EHV-1 in the second half of gestation. As a consequence, it is recommended that pregnant mares be

vaccinated against EHV-1 at 5, 7 and 9 months of gestation.

Mares that are determined to be open in the late summer/fall examination can be housed under lights beginning in December to stimulate early follicular development and advance the date of the first ovulation of the year. Mares maintained under natural light conditions in geographical areas where distinct seasonal climate changes exist stop cycling during the winter months. The first ovulation of the year will occur in these mares, on average, in late April or early May.

Open mares exposed to 15 or 16 hours of light and allowed 8 to 9 hours of darkness beginning in early December will start cycling in early to mid February. Mares can be housed outside during the day and brought into a barn or paddock in the late afternoon. Automatic timers are an efficient and effective way to control the duration of light exposure. The timers can be set to go on an hour before dusk and shut off at 10:00 or 11:00 at night.

On many farms, the pregnancy status of mares is not rechecked between the 50 day pregnancy examination and the following spring. Even then, a mare may not be evaluated unless it is felt that she is not as big as she should be or is not bagging up. It is a fact of life that some mares are not going to carry their foal to term. It will be too late to use lights to stimulate an early onset of cyclicity in an open mare if the pregnancy status is not determined until the spring.

Confirmation of pregnancy status in the fall will allow for the early identification of open mares and give owners an opportunity to make appropriate management decisions for each mare.