



**AS FOALING SEASON IS UNDERWAY, KNOW THE THREE STAGES OF LABOR IN THE MARE**  
Press Release

As foaling season approaches, horse owners who are expecting foals this year should know how to recognize the signs of labor in a foaling mare. The normal gestation length for a mare can range from 320 to 360 days, with the average being around 340 days.

Stage One

The first stage of labor is generally the longest and may take from one to four hours. The mare may act restless, circling her stall or paddock. She may get up and down frequently, pass small amounts of manure or urine and act nervous. The mare may also show some colic-like symptoms such as looking at her sides, sweating along her neck and flanks and showing signs of abdominal discomfort. Mares may not exhibit all of these symptoms but usually have a distinct change of behavior during Stage One labor.

Stage Two

This stage of labor begins when the mare's "water" breaks and ends when the foal has been delivered. The process takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The water breaking is actually the rupture of the chorioallantoic membrane, releasing allantoic fluid. The membrane usually ruptures before being pushed through the cervix and the allantoic fluid will be expelled in a gush. At this point, uterine contractions will usually begin in earnest. Generally at this point, the mare will lay

down if she has not already done so. Once the water has broken, the feet and head of the foal should start to emerge. The front feet should be delivered first with the soles pointing down in a normal delivery. One front foot is generally slightly ahead of the other and the muzzle of the foal will be at the level of its knees. The foal is encased in a thin, transparent, whitish membrane called the amniotic sack. Once the foal has been delivered, if the sack did not rupture during the labor, it should be torn open and pulled back from the foal's face and head to allow the foal to breathe.

In contrast, if you see a velvety-red membrane emerging from the vulva, it is a sign that the placenta has detached prematurely without rupturing and it is an emergency situation commonly referred to as "red-bag". You should consult with your veterinarian prior to when your mare is due to foal to discuss what you should do if this situation occurs.

Stage Three

Stage three is the expulsion of the placenta. It may take from one to three hours. If the placenta has not been expelled after three hours, it is considered retained and you should contact your veterinarian.

Consult with your veterinarian about the stages of labor and what to look for prior to

the time your mare is due to foal. Develop a strategy of what to do if, for example, there is no sign of a foal after the water has broken. Make sure you have a foaling kit with the basic essentials close by the foaling stall along with the phone number of your veterinarian and other people that may be of assistance. Most mares foal with no trouble, but understanding the birth process and what should occur at each stage will ensure that you will be able to enjoy the birth of your foal without undue worry and stress.

This article is provided as an educational service of the Equine Reproduction Laboratory at Colorado State University: <http://www.cvmb.colostate.edu/bms/erl/>