When your mare is expecting a foal, a few key things are important.

First, provide her with a clean, dry, quiet and safe environment. Often a large grassy pen is cleaner and safer for a foaling mare than a stall.

Second, always have your veterinarian's phone number and a truck and trailer nearby in case problems arise. Mares deliver their foals rapidly and any delay in progress can mean something is wrong.

Third, have your supplies clean, together and nearby. This includes a halter and lead rope for your mare, a timer and notepad, warm water, paper towels or roll cotton, a gentle liquid soap such as Ivory® and a dilute solution of Betadine® or Nolvasan®. The water, paper towels and soap can be used to clean the mare's vulva prior to foaling. Use the timer to monitor the mare's progress through labor and the foal's progress after birth.

Once a mare starts having active contractions (laying down and pushing), she should have a foal within 30 minutes. During this time she may rise and lay down several times in order to position the foal for delivery. Normal position for delivery of the foal resembles a diving position, the front feet first with one slightly ahead of the other and hooves down. This is followed by the nose, head, neck shoulders and hindquarters. After delivery of the foal, the placenta should pass within 3 hours.

Once the foal has been delivered, watch it for breathing and movement. The foal should quickly respond to its environment and should stand within 1 to 2 hours and nurse by 2 to 3 hours of age. If any of these times are exceeded, call your veterinarian for assistance.

The dilute Betadine® or Nolvasan® solution is used to dip the foal's navel 2 to 3 times in the first 24 hours. Most mares foal without any need of assistance, but being prepared can save the mare's and foal's lives when problems arise.

This column is provided by the faculty of the OSU Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

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