

15 Facts About Assessing the Neonatal Foal's Health

The newborn foal is both precious and precarious. When things go right during birth and a foal's first hours of life, it can all seem so easy: The foal is up, nursing, playing, and ready to follow mom in a matter of hours. But when things go wrong for a neonatal foal, they can go very wrong, and fast. Knowing the signs of distress to look for during foaling and those first few hours, and acting immediately, can literally mean the difference between life and death.



1 Approximately 3 to 7% of foals have some kind of significant health issue in the first month of life and need intensive care to survive. **TheHorse.com/35880**

2 Most neonatal foal problems result from high-risk pregnancies. Health conditions, such as maternal illness or premature placenta separation, can affect fetal development and maturity and can result in severe neonatal illness. **TheHorse.com/33659**

3 The newborn foal should immediately sit itself up, be alert and responsive, and have a respiratory rate of about 60 breaths per minute (lowering to 15-35 breaths per minute within a few hours). **TheHorse.com/31507**

4 The veterinarian or foaling manager should monitor the newborn foal's heart rate and temperature. However, a foal's cardiovascular rate is highly labile (liable to change), and fevers are unreliable indicators of health, because the foal's body doesn't regulate temperature well. **TheHorse.com/37488**

5 Additionally, check the foal's mucus membranes for signs of jaundice (yellow), cyanosis (blue color indicating a lack of oxygen), hemorrhage (red areas which might indicate trauma or

sepsis), or pallor (paleness suggesting loss of whole blood or hemolysis). **TheHorse.com/37488**

6 A newborn foal's coronary bands can also indicate health problems. Problem signs to look for include being too hot, too cold, or excessively red in color. **TheHorse.com/37488**

7 The healthy foal should interact closely with the mare, sleep well regularly, and be active when awake. **TheHorse.com/37488**

8 Cold extremities and weak pulses are common signs of shock in newborn foals. **TheHorse.com/37488**

9 The mare's health post-foaling can indicate the foal's health. For example, one study found that mares showing evidence of infection postpartum were more likely to have foals with health problems. **TheHorse.com/37488**

10 A foal should pass its meconium (first manure, which is dark and hard) within 24 hours of birth. The manure should then become softer and lighter in color. **TheHorse.com/27847**

11

The mare should expel the placenta within three hours of foaling.

TheHorse.com/30492

12

Once it's expelled, lay out the placenta to inspect it. It should form the letter "N" and have no blunt edges, which indicate missing pieces. TheHorse.com/30492

13

The newborn foal's immune system doesn't respond to invasion by bacteria as quickly as an adult's immune system. This slow response can lead to overwhelming infection if the foal hasn't nursed and absorbed an adequate amount of colostrum (the mare's first milk, which supplies antibodies to the foal via passive transfer). TheHorse.com/10268



The placenta offers information about the mare and foal's health post foaling.

COURTESY ROOD & RIDDLE EQUINE HOSPITAL

14

Signs a newborn foal isn't feeding include a lack of urination, milk on his face, and the mare streaming milk.

TheHorse.com/37488

15

Continue to carefully monitor newborn foals during their first days of life. Even those that appear normal and healthy at birth can develop problems quickly. TheHorse.com/35881

By Michelle Anderson, *The Horse* digital managing editor; reviewed by Peter Morresey, BVSc, MACVSc, Dipl. ACVIM, Dipl. ACT, Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital, Lexington, Kentucky

Watch **Dr. Peter Morresey's** in-depth presentation about assessing the newborn foal and placenta, which is available now on *The Horse's Vet On Demand: Equine Veterinary Seminars* — on your schedule!

TheHorse.com/37488

CLICK HERE  TO PLAY VIDEO




Dechra
Veterinary Products


EQUIDONE® Gel
(domperidone)



Dechra Veterinary Products, 7015 College Blvd., Suite 525, Overland Park, KS 66211

Toll Free (866) 933-2472

www.dechra-us.com