

18 Facts About High-Risk Equine Pregnancies

Breeding a mare is an exciting and painstaking endeavor for a horse owner. A healthy foal results from years of planning, preparation, and financial and emotional investment: selecting the perfect stallion, working with breeding managers and veterinarians, settling and confirming the mare's pregnancy, and ensuring a healthy gestation and foaling. With all the effort breeding requires, losing the pregnancy, the foal, or even the mare is a devastating prospect. Identifying high-risk pregnancies early can help safeguard against those losses.



Producing a foal is often a labor of love. Identifying high-risk pregnancies early on can help protect your investment of time, emotion, and money

1 The average healthy gestation length in the mare ranges from 320 to 362 days; most mares will foal within 330-345 days of successful breeding. TheHorse.com/31851

2 A high-risk pregnancy is one related to some condition or disease in a pregnant mare that could lead to fetal loss in late gestation or neonatal loss in the first day postpartum. TheHorse.com/37637

3 High-risk pregnancies can be attributed to placental, fetal, or mare factors. TheHorse.com/37637

4 Most placental issues have low risk to mare but high risk to fetus/foal. TheHorse.com/37637

5 Ascending placentitis (which occurs when bacterial or fungal organisms enter the sterile uterus from the lower reproductive tract) is the most common infectious cause of abortion in the mare. TheHorse.com/37637

6 Bacterial placentitis in the mare is most commonly caused by *Streptococcus* spp. TheHorse.com/37637

7 Early identification and intervention is key to treating placentitis. Drug treatments focus on managing infection, stopping contractions, improving circulation, and reducing inflammation. TheHorse.com/37637

8 During premature placental separation, the chorion (the outermost placental membrane) presents at the vulva first as a red, velvety-looking membrane, which gives the condition its "red bag delivery" name. The risk during a red bag delivery is oxygen deprivation to the foal. TheHorse.com/37637

9 Researchers don't fully understand the causes of premature placental separation. Red bag deliveries can be associated with placentitis but also occur in pregnancies with healthy placentas. TheHorse.com/37637

10 Fescue toxicosis is not caused by grass itself. Rather, it's caused by an endophyte (a type of fungus) commonly associated with fescue. The endophyte and grass have a symbiotic relationship: The plant provides the endophyte with a safe place to live and grow while the alkaloids produced by the fungus make tall fescue insect-resistant, as well as drought- and grazing-tolerant. Unfortunately, alkaloids are detrimental to livestock, including horses. TheHorse.com/32949

11 Treatment and management of fescue toxicosis include removing mares from endophyte-infected pastures and feed, along with administering domperidone, a dopamine antagonist. **TheHorse.com/32949**

12 In one study from the United Kingdom, researchers found that umbilical torsion (twisting, which deprives the fetus of nutrition and oxygen) was the leading diagnosis in aborted fetuses. **TheHorse.com/37637**

13 Having a particularly long umbilical cord (36 to 83 cm, or roughly 14 to 32 inches) predisposes a pregnancy to umbilical torsion. Common issues related to a long umbilical cord include it wrapping around the fetus' body or limbs; poor placental perfusion; growth retardation (due to lack of nutrition); and abortion. **TheHorse.com/37637**

14 Cases of hydrops (increased fluid in the fetal space) rarely result in viable foals and often endanger the mare's life, as well. **TheHorse.com/37637**

15 Placental insufficiency results in the fetus not receiving enough nutrition and oxygen and typically causes retarded fetal development. The condition is most often seen in older mares and is likely related to endometriosis (a disorder in which tissue that normally lines the inside of the uterus—the endometrium—grows outside the uterus) or endometrial degeneration. **TheHorse.com/37637**

16 Mule foals are more likely to experience neonatal isoerythrolysis (NI, or jaundiced foal), a condition in which a mare's antibodies attack her foal's red blood cells. **TheHorse.com/37637**

17 Carrying twins is one of the most common noninfectious cause of abortion in horses. **TheHorse.com/37637**

18 Mare reproductive loss syndrome (MRLS, a cause of early pregnancy losses and late-term abortion) was first reported in 2001 and is associated with eastern tent caterpillar exposure. **TheHorse.com/37637**

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Watch **Dr. Barry Ball's** in-depth presentation about identifying, managing, and treating high-risk pregnancies, which is available now on **The Horse's Vet On Demand: Equine Veterinary Seminars** — on your schedule!

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