

Well Baby Check-up



As the days grow longer and temperatures warm, new foals begin appearing. It is a magical time of year for those of us who love horses. The sight of a new foal prancing at its mother's side will warm the heart of the most cynical among us.

When a foal is born, one of the steps that should be taken to insure the well being of the foal and the mare is a post-partum examination. This exam evaluates all vital systems of the foal including eyes, oral cavity, heart, lungs, abdomen, legs, and umbilicus. The baby is also checked to make sure it has passed its meconium. Foals can develop signs of colic if the meconium is not passed.

A blood sample should be drawn from the foal to evaluate the amount of colostral antibodies absorbed from nursing. The specific antibody that is assayed is IgG which is present in high amounts in high quality colostrum. These antibodies reach the foal's blood stream through nursing and are absorbed only during the first 24 hours of life. In fact, the amount of colostrum that can be absorbed by the foal's intestinal lining drops rapidly after 16 hours of life. If 24 hours have passed since delivery and the foal's colostral absorption is inadequate, the only way to bolster the foal's antibody level is via a plasma transfusion. It is uncommon to start newborn foals on antibiotics, but if an unusual circumstance has occurred, this can be discussed with the veterinarian.

The mare is also checked by assessing her heart rate, abdominal sounds, appetite, udder, and vulva (for signs of birthing trauma). Be sure to save the placenta, so it can be evaluated for completeness. A good way to preserve the placenta is to place it in a bucket and cover it with water. Keep it out of reach of your dogs and other critters.

Post-partum exams can be scheduled through the front desk at the clinic. Be sure to let the scheduler know the time of birth and if there are any problems of which you are aware. The ideal time to examine the foal who has had a problem-free delivery is about 12 hours after birth. This time frame can be adjusted based on scheduling issues and if the foal or mare are encountering problems.

We hope to see you and your new foal this spring.