



BRIARPOINTE VETERINARY CLINIC

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BREEDING FOR PET OWNERS

4. Whelping or Birth

What should I do to prepare for the birth of the puppies?

From the time of mating, many females will show changes in behavior, often becoming more affectionate. However, some pets will become uncharacteristically irritable and may even act aggressive during pregnancy. Be sensitive to your pet's behavioral changes and be sure to alert your veterinarian if you observe any abnormalities that you are uncomfortable with.



Does "morning sickness" occur in pregnant dogs?

Some dogs do experience a few days of vomiting ("morning sickness") usually followed by the development of a ravenous appetite that persists throughout pregnancy. "Morning sickness" does not occur in all dogs. There is also a normal decrease in the desire for exercise and physical activity during the first and last two weeks of pregnancy.

My dog seems to want to hide in strange places. Is this normal?

During the last week of pregnancy the female often starts to look for a safe place for whelping. Some pets appear to become confused, wanting to be with their owners and at the same time wanting to prepare their nest. It is a good idea to get your pet used to the place where you want her to have her puppies well in advance of whelping. Even so, there are a number of dogs that insist on having their puppies near the owner. This may be on your bed in the middle of the night. Be warned!

If she does start whelping in my bedroom, what should I do?

It will be far less stressful for everyone to allow her to continue in her chosen place. Make sure you spread lots of old newspaper and, if possible, cover the carpet with a plastic sheet covered by sheets or newspaper. It is normal for fetal fluids to be colored green. These stains can be difficult to remove.

Once your pet has finished whelping, try gently moving her and new family to your chosen place. She should be well acquainted with this area prior to whelping.

If your pet insists on being near you with her puppies, allow her to do so. A whelping box in a quiet corner of the living room that has been protected with newspapers and sheets is preferable to an anxious mother constantly leaving her puppies.

Should I be present during the whelping?

Some dogs like the owner to be with them the whole time they are in labor. Others prefer to have their puppies in seclusion. Respect your pet's wishes and avoid intruding any more than necessary.



What should I prepare in advance?

1. Make sure you have plenty of clean newspaper and sheets or towels.

Select the place where you would like her to have her puppies. Make sure that a suitable whelping box has been placed there. The whelping box should be large enough for her to move around freely, with low sides so that she can see and easily move in and out. A large cardboard packing case with an open top and a piece cut out at the side is ideal for many dogs. Be sure to ask your veterinary healthcare team for more

advice on making a whelping box for your pet.

Line the bottom of the whelping box with plenty of paper. There will be a large amount of fluid at the time of whelping. If sufficient layers of newspaper and cloth are laid before whelping, you can remove soiled layers with minimum interruption to the mother and her newborn puppies immediately after the whelping.

Acrylic bedding, which is easily washed, can be used to cover the newspaper, although, during the whelping, plain newspaper is probably less hazardous and the puppies are less likely to get hidden beneath it.

How will I know when my dog is going to start having puppies?

Some females stop eating during the last twenty-four hours before labor, although this is certainly not universal. The rectal temperature will drop below 100°F (37.8°C), usually an hour or two before whelping.

These signs may last for up to twenty-four hours and are part of first stage labor.

Second stage labor is the *stage of delivery*. Your dog will start to strain. **If straining continues for two hours without any signs of a watery discharge (“water breaking”) or puppies, you should call us.** Most dogs experience no complications with delivery. First time mothers should be attended by their owners until at least one or two puppies have been born.



If there are no problems, further attendance will depend upon the desire of your pet and the situation. As mentioned previously, some dogs prefer you to be present while others prefer to be alone.

My dog has not had puppies before. Do you think she will be all right left alone during whelping?

Primagravidas, or females having puppies for the first time, should be kept under surveillance until you think they have finished, just in case they get into trouble. Make sure the newborn puppies are being properly cared for by your dog, particularly if she is still in labor. Some females are more concerned with straining to produce the next puppy than caring for the puppies already delivered. If that is the case, a small cardboard box with a towel-wrapped bottle filled with warm (not hot) water should be placed with the puppies to ensure they remain warm while the mother finishes delivery.

How long will whelping take?

Delivery times vary. Dogs with fairly slim heads such as Shelties, Collies and Dobermans may complete delivery of all the puppies within two to three hours. Brachycephalic breeds, or breeds with large, round heads such as, Boston Terriers, and Pekingese tend to have more difficult deliveries and sometimes will produce one or two puppies relatively quickly and then rest for a while before labor starts again.

If your dog has produced at least one puppy and does not strain again within two hours, your veterinarian should be contacted. If the pregnant female has been straining continuously for a couple of hours and has not had a puppy, it is also important that she receives immediate veterinary attention.

How are puppies normally born? Do they usually come out backwards?

Puppies are usually born headfirst with the forelegs extended. This is called *anterior presentation*. *Posterior presentation* is also normal for dogs. In this case the puppy is born with tail and hindlegs emerging first. This is not a *breech presentation*. A breech presentation is one in which the hindlegs are extended forward and the tail and bottom are presented first. This is abnormal and may require a c-section or veterinary assistance to deliver the puppy. Some breech presentations can result in a normal delivery. If a puppy's tail is seen hanging from the vulva or there is a lump just behind the vulval lips and your pet is straining, call immediately.



Should my dog pass afterbirth after each puppy?

Each puppy is enclosed in a sac that is part of the placenta or afterbirth. This sac is usually broken during the birthing process and passed through the vulva after each puppy is born. You may not notice any afterbirths, since it is normal for the female to eat them. The hormones in the afterbirth help with milk production. Sometimes a mother will have two or three puppies and then pass several of the afterbirths together.

Is it important that I count the afterbirths?

It may be difficult to obtain an accurate count of the number of afterbirths since most dogs will eat them quickly. If the afterbirth is not passed, it usually disintegrates and passes within twenty-four to forty-eight hours after delivery. This usually happens when the dog defecates.

If the mother has a bloody or smelly vaginal discharge twenty-four to forty-eight hours after delivery, veterinary help should be sought.

How soon should a puppy be born after it starts emerging from the birth canal?

In a normal delivery a few contractions will produce the puppy. Ten minutes is reasonable. Following delivery the mother will lick and chew at the puppy and often appears to be treating it quite roughly. In most cases this is normal behavior and stimulates the puppy to start breathing. During the chewing and licking she tears the birth sac and exposes the mouth and nose so that the puppy can breathe. You will realize all is well if the puppy starts to whimper or cry within a minute or so after birth.

Sometimes the placenta is delivered immediately after the puppy and is attached by the umbilical cord. The mother normally chews the umbilical cord and breaks it about an inch from the puppy, consuming the placenta at the same time. In some dogs, the mother seems to become over enthusiastic and may lick and chew at the puppy until she injures it. Therefore, it is advisable to observe the dog as she cares for her newborn puppies, particularly if it is her first litter.

I have heard that some females will have a puppy still attached to the afterbirth and run away and leave it.

This can occasionally happen in first-time mothers. If this happens, it is important that you ensure the puppy's mouth and nostrils are clear of any afterbirth or membranes. Remember the puppy is born in a fluid filled sac that usually breaks during birth. If the puppy is delivered still in the sac, break it as quickly as possible. Clean the puppy's face and nostrils and then gently blow on its face to try and stimulate breathing. If the afterbirth is still intact, hold the umbilical cord between your finger and thumb with the puppy resting in the palm of your hand and cut the cord with a pair of scissors approximately an inch from the puppy. Holding it for a few seconds will usually stop any bleeding. Otherwise tie it with clean thread.

Next, hold the puppy in a towel and gently rub it until the hair starts to dry. The puppy should then start to whimper and breathe normally. The tongue should be pink. Once it is breathing normally, you can offer it to the mother. If she is more interested in delivering further puppies, place the puppy in a box with a warm water bottle covered by a towel. Be sure to cover the puppy with a warm towel to keep it warm.

What happens if the puppy is visible but my dog can't deliver it?

Speed is of the essence in such situations, especially if it is a posterior or breech presentation. If the puppy is coming headfirst make sure that the membranes are removed from the visible part of the mouth and face. If the puppy is coming backwards, speed is important otherwise the puppy will suffocate. This is considered a medical emergency.



What should I do?

Regardless of whether the puppy is coming head first or hind first, take a piece of clean tissue or clean cloth and gently grab the puppy and apply traction at approximately forty-five degrees to the angle between the spine and the hind legs. Do not pull only when the mother strains.

Constant, gentle traction on the puppy will stimulate additional contractions. Once the puppy has been born, clear the membranes and then cut the umbilical cord. If the afterbirth is still inside the mother, do not worry. It is important to stimulate the puppy by blowing gently down the nostrils and mouth and clearing any discharges, membranes, debris and also stimulating it by gently rubbing it with a towel until it starts to breathe.

If you cannot dislodge the puppy or if it appears to be painful to the mother, seek veterinary help immediately.

Is it true that the puppy will die if it is not stimulated immediately after birth?

If the puppy is born within the fetal sac, it will be unable to breathe. If the mother doesn't break the sac, you should remove it by following the above instructions.

Fortunately, most puppies break the sac as they are passing through the birth canal.

I understand puppies can drown in their own fetal fluids. Is this true?

Newborn puppies may try to breathe while still within the fluid-filled sac. The fluid then enters the lungs. This is an emergency. If a puppy has breathed in fetal sac fluid, their breathing will sound raspy and gurgly. This fluid should be removed as soon as possible. Hold the puppy in the palm of your hand, cradling the head between your first and second fingers. The head should be held while your other hand supports and steadies the body. Swing the puppy firmly downwards, headfirst. The centrifugal force generated should make the puppy gasp. Gravity will help the fluid and mucus flow out of the lungs and mouth. Repeat this several times being sure to check the color of the tongue and listening to the breathing. The tongue should change from a greyish blue color to pink if you are successful. If it remains bluish, continue the swinging process. Do not give up for at least ten to fifteen minutes. Once the puppy is breathing, place it in the warm box.

Is it possible to keep the puppies too warm?

The puppies have been living in a temperature of 101.5°F (38.5°C) which is pretty warm by human standards. However, immediately after birth puppies are unable to control their own body temperature and are dependent upon external warmth. Many puppies lack the strength to move away from a heat source. Be sure to use a thermometer, especially if you are using heat lamps. Keep the area the puppies are kept in at around 100°F (30°C).

Should I continue the heat source if the mother is nursing her puppies?

It is usually not necessary to provide external heat if the mother is properly caring for her puppies and the whelping room is warm. . If a heat lamp is used, extreme care must be exercised otherwise the mother and puppies can easily become overheated.

Edited by John S. Parker, DVM July 2007

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