



Mansfield Animal Clinic

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Breeding for Pet Owners - Whelping in Dogs

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

After 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 are concerned.

Does "morning sickness" occur in pregnant dogs?

"Some dogs do experience a few days of vomiting ("morning sickness")..."

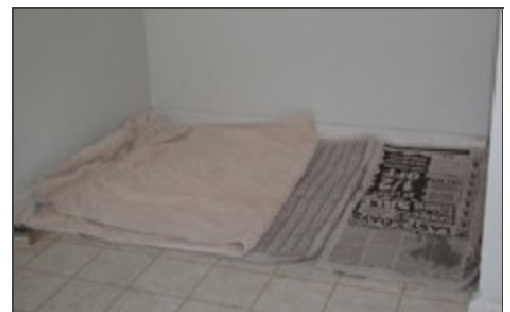
Although it is not common, some dogs do experience a few days of vomiting ("morning sickness") usually followed by the development of a ravenous appetite that persists throughout pregnancy. There is also a normal decrease in the desire for exercise and physical activity during the first and last two 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. In spite of your good intentions, some dogs 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 or impossible to remove.



"A whelping or "nesting" box in a quiet corner of the living room is preferable to an anxious mother constantly leaving her puppies."

Once your pet has finished whelping, try gently moving her and new family to your chosen place. If your pet insists on being near you with her puppies, allow her. A whelping or "nesting" box in a quiet corner of the living room 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. If your pet chooses to be left alone, try to avoid intruding any more than necessary.

What should I do to be prepared?

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

2. Select the place where you would like her to have her puppies and put a suitable whelping box in that location. The whelping box should be large enough for her to move around freely, with low sides so that she can see out and easily move in and out. A large cardboard packing case with an open top and an opening cut out of the side is ideal for smaller dogs. Be sure to ask your veterinary healthcare team for more advice on making a whelping box for your pet.



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

4. Acrylic bedding, which is easily washed, can be used to cover the newspaper. However, during whelping, plain newspaper is more absorbent 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 day of pregnancy, although this is certainly not universal. In most cases, a drop in rectal temperature, to less than 100°F (37.8°C), occurs in the last 24 hours and signals impending labor. She will often go into a corner or a quiet room and start scratching or digging to make a bed.

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 intense straining continues for more than thirty minutes without any signs of a watery discharge ("water breaking") or puppies, you should contact your veterinarian. Most dogs experience no complications with delivery. You should stay with a first time mother until at least one or two puppies have been born to make sure that everything is going well.

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 your dog is properly caring for her newborn puppies, 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, place the puppies in a small cardboard box containing a towel-wrapped bottle filled with warm (not hot) water, and covered

with another towel to keep them warm and protected until the mother finishes delivery.

How long will whelping take?

Delivery times vary. Dogs with 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 Bulldogs, Boston Terriers, and Pekingese tend to have deliveries that are more difficult; sometimes they 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, you should contact your veterinarian."

If your dog has produced at least one puppy and does not strain again within two hours, you should contact your veterinarian. If the whelping female has been straining continuously for a couple of hours and has not had a puppy, she requires immediate veterinary attention.

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

Puppies are usually born headfirst with the forelegs extended, called an *anterior presentation*. *Posterior presentation*, in which the puppy is born with tail and hindlegs emerging first, is also normal for dogs. 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 vulvar lips and your pet is straining, contact your veterinarian 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 passes through the vulva after each puppy is born. You may not notice any afterbirth, 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 out of the uterus within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. This usually happens when the dog defecates.

If the mother develops 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."

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. This is normal behavior and stimulates the puppy to start breathing. During the chewing and licking, she tears open 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 or afterbirth is delivered immediately after the puppy and is attached by the umbilical cord. The mother normally chews on 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 that is still attached to the afterbirth, then run away and leave it. If this happens, what should I do?

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 birthing.

"If the puppy is still enclosed in the sac, break it open as quickly as possible."

If the puppy is still enclosed in the sac, break it open as quickly as possible. Clean the puppy's face and nostrils and then gently blow on its face to try to 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. Applying pressure to the stump with your fingers for a few seconds will usually stop any bleeding. Otherwise, you can tie it with clean thread.

Next, hold the puppy in a towel and gently rub it until it is 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 fetal membranes covering the visible part of the mouth and face are removed so that it can breathe. If the puppy is coming backwards, speed is important otherwise the puppy will suffocate.

What should I do?

Regardless of whether the puppy is coming headfirst or hind first, take a piece of clean tissue or clean cloth and gently grab the puppy, pulling it downwards at approximately forty-five degrees to the angle between the mother's spine and the hind legs. Pull constantly and gently, not just when the mother strains. Constant, gentle traction (pulling) on the puppy will stimulate additional contractions. Once the puppy has been born, clear the fetal membranes from its nose and mouth and then cut the umbilical cord. If the afterbirth is still inside the mother, do not worry.

"Stimulate the puppy by blowing gently down the nostrils and mouth..."

It is important to stimulate the puppy by blowing gently down the nostrils and mouth to clear any fluids and debris, as well as 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 does not 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 fluids, its breathing will sound raspy and gurgly."

If a puppy has breathed in fetal fluids, its breathing will sound raspy and gurgly. You must remove this fluid as soon as possible. Hold the puppy in the palm of your hand, cradling the head between your first and second fingers. Use your other hand to support and steady its 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 grayish 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. Immediately after birth, puppies are unable to control their own body temperature and are dependent upon external warmth.

"Newborn puppies lack the strength to move away from a heat source and can easily become overheated."



Newborn puppies lack the strength to move away from a heat source and can easily become overheated. If you are using heat lamps, be sure to monitor the temperature with a thermometer. Keep the ambient temperature in the whelping box at around 85-90°F (29-32°C) during the first few days. (For more details, see the Client Education Handout "Breeding for Pet Owners #6 - Rearing the Puppies and Care of the Mother")

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.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM
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