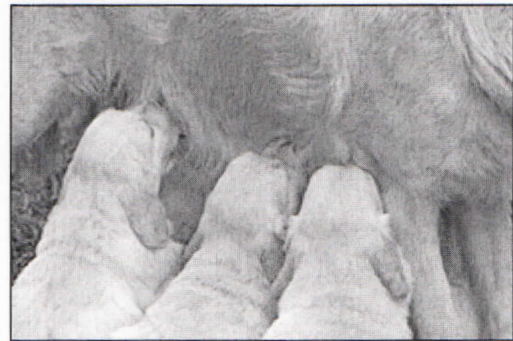


Breeding for Dog Owners – Problems at Birth

What happens if my dog has trouble delivering her puppies?

Although the majority of dogs will give birth without the need for veterinary assistance, problems can arise which require veterinary attention. It is important to closely monitor your pet during birthing and seek veterinary care if you have any concerns.



How will I know that she is starting?

When whelping or birth is imminent, the female often stops eating (although this is not always the case) and her rectal temperature often drops below 100.5°F (38.1°C). The female will often go into a corner or a quiet room and start scratching to make her bed. If you see any of these signs, you may wish to notify your veterinarian since this is the first stage of labor, when the birth canal starts to dilate.

This is followed by second stage labor when the female starts to contract her uterus forcibly. These contractions start gradually and increase in intensity, frequency and duration. If intense contractions have been occurring for twenty to thirty minutes without a puppy being born, it is important to contact your veterinarian.

You should also contact your veterinarian if any of the following occur:

1. The mother strains for eight to ten minutes with a puppy or a fluid filled bubble stuck in the birth canal
2. The mother has a rectal temperature of more than 103°F (39.5°C)
3. You observe fresh bleeding from the vagina which persists for more than ten minutes
4. You observe a green discharge from the vagina without puppies being born

Are puppies, like babies, sometimes born prematurely?

"Premature delivery does occur in dogs but it is not common."

Premature delivery does occur in dogs but it is not as common as you might think. Often these so-called premature deliveries have actually been an error in recording the mating dates or a miscalculation in gestation period (period of pregnancy), which is usually sixty-three (63) days.

How can I tell if the pups are premature?

Truly premature puppies may be small, thin and have little or no hair. Mothers will often reject premature puppies and these puppies soon die of hypothermia (low body temperature). Survival is possible but they require an enormous amount of care and often have to be hand fed since they are unable to suckle. Sometimes they have to be fed by stomach tube (called "*gavage*" feeding). If necessary, your veterinarian will show you how to do this.

"Ensure that the puppies receive some of the mother's "first milk" or *colostrum*, which is rich in antibodies and helps prevent infection in the newborn puppies."

If it is at all possible, ensure that the puppies receive some of the mother's "first milk" or *colostrum*, which is rich in antibodies and helps prevent infection in the newborn puppies.

What else should I know about caring for premature puppies?

Excessive heat (hyperthermia) can be just as harmful as hypothermia. Environmental temperature must stay at around 90°F (30°C) and the box must be large enough so that the puppies can move away from the heat source if necessary.

The puppies must be kept in a humid atmosphere if they are being raised away from the mother. The mother usually licks and cleans the puppies frequently. As a result, not only is the environment warm, it is also moist. You can provide a moist environment by placing warm, damp cloths in the box beside the pups.

How long will I have to hand raise premature puppies?

If the puppies can suckle, your veterinarian will show you how to hold them on to the mother's teats. If this fails, your veterinarian will advise you on milk replacement formulas and proper puppy bottles. Once the puppies are stronger and able to suckle properly, the mother may resume caring for them.

"Hand-raising puppies is extremely challenging and many puppies fail to survive."

Although it can be rewarding if the puppies survive, hand-raising puppies is extremely challenging and many puppies fail to survive.

Are some of the puppies likely to be stillborn or die shortly after birth?

With animals that have multiple births, like dogs, it is not unusual for some of the offspring either to be stillborn or to die shortly after birth. Sometimes a stillborn puppy will disrupt the birthing process, resulting in dystocia or a birthing complication. At other times a dead puppy may be born normally.

Determining the cause of these neonatal deaths is often impossible without a full post mortem examination (*necropsy* or *autopsy*), including bacteriological cultures and submission of tissues to a histopathologist. Some causes of neonatal death are preventable. It is important to consult with your veterinarian regarding any problems with your pet's pregnancy or whelping.



I am told that with some breeds Caesarean sections are more common than a normal delivery. Is this true?

Unfortunately, certain breeds do seem to have increased risk of *dystocia* (difficult birth) resulting in the need for a Caesarean section or c-section surgery.

"Breeds with broad heads or flat faces tend to have a higher incidence of birthing problems."

Breeds with broad heads or flat faces tend to have a higher incidence of birthing problems. The correct timing of a c-section is always difficult in dogs. If surgery is delayed excessively, it can result in dead puppies and if embarked upon too early, the puppies may be premature. It is important that you and your veterinarian have a full and frank discussion about the relative benefits and risks of this procedure.

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