Foster – Pregnant dog/whelping

**How long is a dog pregnant?**

The canine gestation period is generally about 63 days, however may range between 58 to 68 days. Once a pregnant dog is in foster, we have identified fetal skeletons on x-ray, indicating that the babies are at least at 42-45 days gestation. Unfortunately, as the exact date of gestation is typically unknown, we will not have a birth date, however the identification of fetal skeletons means that your foster mom dog will have her babies within the next 3 weeks.

 **What should my mother dog eat?**

Prior to giving birth, your mother dog will require twice her normal caloric requirement. You will be sent home with a proper growth/puppy diet. After she gives birth and begins nursing, her caloric requirement will triple. She should have dry food available at all times and be offered wet food three times throughout the day.

**How to prepare for birth?**

As your mother dog prepares for birth, she should be kept in a quiet, warm room all to herself where she is not coming in contact with or interrupted by other dogs or animals or high human traffic. A whelping area or box can be set up for her in the room. Whelping boxes should be designed to provide a safe and comfortable area for the labor, as well as a secure place for the puppies after they are born. The box should be big enough for mom to stretch out in, as well as enough room for the new puppies, but not so big that the puppies are out of reach for her. Mom should be able to enter and exit the box easily, but tall enough that the puppies can’t get out. You will want to make sure the whelping box can be easily cleaned. A plastic sheet placed underneath the box can help keep things clean and lining the box with newspaper or puppy pads can help make cleanup easier.

**What to expect when labor begins?**

During the initial stages of labor mom will begin to have uterine contractions. She may appear restless and may begin pacing, digging, shivering, panting, or in some cases she may vomit. She should have water available at all times. This stage of labor may last between 6 to 12 hours.

Mom should be allowed to labor and birth in a quiet environment without interference. However, it is important to monitor the process without distracting or disrupting mom. You should only interact with mom if there appears to be a problem or concern.

The puppies will be born covered in a membrane. Mom’s natural instinct should be to clean the membrane away by licking and biting. This is natural and part of the process. Through this process she will also cut the umbilical cord herself. You should only intervene if mom does not show interest or does not clean the membrane away within the first 2 minutes. If this does happen, you may clean the membrane away using a clean towel to prevent the puppy from suffocating. Then offer the puppy back to mom to allow her to continue cleaning and caring for the puppy.

On average, puppies may be born every 45 to 60 minutes. Mom may push for 10-30 minutes with each delivery. It is normal for mom to break and rest in between births. You should be concerned if she appears to be straining and pushing for over an hour or if it has been longer than 4 hours since the last delivery if more puppies are expected.

**The babies are here, now what?**

Once all the babies are born, mom will be tired. She will need quiet and rest. Food and water should be available for her outside of the whelping box for her to access when she is ready. You should allow her to rest. As long as mom appears comfortable and the puppies appear to be nursing, do not handle the puppies yet.

After the first 24-48 hours, when mom has rested and recovered, you may begin assessing the puppies and recording weights. It is helpful to monitor their weight gain to assess their nutrition intake. If there is concern for weight loss or isolation at any time through the nursing stage, the puppy may need formula supplementation. You should contact the Foster Care Manager for further information and instruction if this is a concern.

It will be normal for mom to have vaginal discharge post-partum. Discharge may be observed for up to 8 weeks following delivery. Normal post-partum discharge should not have a smell, it may vary from dark red-brown to green in color or bloody. If there is any variation from normal or any concerns, please contact the Foster Care Manager.

Please contact the Foster Team at any time if there are any concerns throughout the pregnant, birthing or nursing stages. Once all puppies are born, please call or text the Foster emergency number with a final puppy count. The foster team will be in contact with you regarding all follow up puppy care which will begin at 4 weeks old.

**For emergencies, please contact the Foster emergency number 734-717-4424**

**Non-emergent concerns, please email** **Fosters@hshv.org** **or call 734-661-3520**

If you are unsure if it is an emergency then call or text the emergency number.