

SUPERVISED FOALING SYSTEMS

BY Dr. Laura Harris

Most equine deliveries (foalings) are routine and uneventful. However, we work hard for more than a calendar year to produce a foal. From pre-breeding mare care, to the actual breeding process, to mare care during the pregnancy, we have a great deal of time, energy and money invested as the delivery date approaches. It only makes sense to make arrangements to observe delivery (foaling) and be ready to assist the mare and foal if necessary.

Many methods are available to observe the mare as delivery approaches.

1) Direct observation has traditionally been the standard on large breeding farms. Someone sits with the mares 24 hours each day. This is obviously a very effective method because an experienced individual is immediately available to help the mare and foal. Unfortunately, most of us today, especially on small farms or at home, do not have the time or personnel to provide 24 hour direct observation.

2) Cameras in the foaling stall allow the person responsible for supervising the foaling mobility to leave the foaling stall while still observing the mare.

a) Hard wired cameras

- 1) coaxial cable to a monitor elsewhere on the farm
- 2) require installation of cable from stall to monitor site

b) Wireless cameras

- 1) variable range of transmission
- 2) can experience interference from cordless phones and from wireless internet routers

c) Webcams

- 1) allow transmission to sites distant from the farm
- 2) labor in the mare progresses rapidly – as delivery approaches someone needs to be monitoring the website from an on farm location

3) Halter monitors

- a) positional monitors
- b) easy to use – may have many false alarms if a mare chooses to sleep on her side (delivery position)
- c) can be combined with cameras or webcam to allow observation when alarm sounds
- d) will not alert if mare goes into labor when standing or in sternal position (lying on chest)

- e) availability of halter monitors
<http://www.foalingalarm.com>
<http://www.breederalert.com>

4) Trans-vulvar monitors

- a) alarm sounds when foal or placental membranes begin to pass through vulva
- b) must be sewn onto mare's vulva before delivery date
- c) some mares will rub the monitors off – especially on chain link or “no climb” fencing
- d) availability of trans-vulvar monitors
<http://www.foalalert.com>

5) Vaginal tampon monitors

- a) easy to insert
- b) some mares will develop vaginal infection and possible infection through cervix into uterus
- c) some mares will expel the monitor independent of labor and delivery
- d) if the environmental temperature is above normal body temperature for the horse, the expelled monitor will not experience a temperature drop when expelled from the vagina and will not sound the alert

Regardless of the method you choose to monitor your mare as her due date approaches, you must plan to be physically available (within 15 minutes of her stall) when labor begins.

Plan ahead: organize a foaling kit and emergency phone number list. Pre-arrange emergency transportation of the mare in case that becomes necessary.

Be prepared and the entire labor / delivery process will be less stressful for you and your mare.