

# Normal Birth in Dogs

## (Whelping)

### Preparations for Whelping

Begin preparations for delivery of puppies before the female gives birth. A whelping box should be provided for the mother to begin sleeping in to ensure birth of the puppies in the area you have chosen. The box should be relatively small, with sides 6-8 inches high to keep the puppies from crawling out of the nest. Place the box in a secluded yet familiar area of the home, away from the family traffic, to allow the mother solitude.

Newspapers make excellent bedding because they can be changed easily, are absorbent and can be shredded by the mother as she makes her "nest." If such materials as old quilts, blankets, rugs or towels are used, they must be washed frequently.

If you want to know more precisely when delivery is near, check the rectal temperature of the mother twice daily from the 58<sup>th</sup> day of pregnancy until labor begins. Normal rectal temperature varies between 100.5 and 102.0 F. Within 24 hours before the onset of labor, the rectal temperature drops nearly 2 degrees.

If you are unsure if your dog is pregnant you can see your veterinarian for the following on the dates listed based on day of last breeding:

- Day 21 – Ultrasound may detect fetuses and observe heart beats but number of puppies usually cannot be determined.
- Day 28 – Examination may reveal obvious fetuses on palpation of the abdomen
- After day 47 – X-ray may be able to determine the size and number of fetuses to help with planning for whelping and/or need for c-section.

### Labor and Delivery

Labor in the female dog can be divided into 3 stages. The second and third stages are repeated with the birth of each puppy.

**Stage 1:** During the first stage, the mother seems extremely restless and very nervous, and often seeks seclusion. She may refuse food even if offered her favorite treats. This stage may last 6-24 hours. This is a good time to exercise the mother to allow her to urinate and defecate. Some may have diarrhea and even vomit.

**Stage 2:** During the second stage, contractions and expulsion of the puppies begin. Usually a small greenish sac of fluid protrudes first from the vulva. This is followed by the puppy and its attached placenta. The normal presentation of the puppy is nose first, stomach down. About 1/3 of all puppies, however, are born hindquarters first. This presentation is considered normal in the dog.

After delivery, the mother opens the sac, cleans off the pup and severs the umbilical cord. You may have to perform these functions for the mother. (See obstetric care below). Make sure the sac is removed from the puppy immediately if it is unbroken during delivery.

It is usually best to provide a quiet, dark location where the mother and puppies can be alone. You can look in on them periodically to make sure things are progressing. Too much attention and activity may delay labor and lead to more harm than good.

**Stage 3:** The third stage of labor is the resting stage, which follows each delivery. Mild contractions and delivery of the afterbirth occur in this phase. The mother will usually eat the afterbirth, which is considered normal. This stage usually lasts 10-30 minutes, but it may range from a few seconds to an hour.

Note: There have been reported cases of complete cessation of labor between puppies for as long as 12 – 24 hours depending on stress to the mother based on the perceived security of the environment.

### **Obstetric Care**

After a pup is delivered, remove all membranes covering the puppy, clean the face and remove mucus from the mouth and nose. Rub the puppy with a clean towel to dry it and to stimulate respiration and circulation. After a few minutes of rubbing, the puppy should begin to squirm and cry loudly. Some puppies may take well over 10 minutes to get the desired response, so don't give up too early.

The umbilical cord should be tied about one inch from the puppy's body with fine thread and then cut on the side of the knot away from the puppy.

### **Assisting with Birth**

If a puppy seems to be lodged in the birth canal and the mother cannot expel it after a few minutes, rapid assistance is necessary. There may not be time to call your veterinarian and drive to the hospital.

Grasp the puppy with a clean towel and exert steady, firm traction. Do not jerk or pull suddenly. Traction may have to be applied for as long as 5 minutes. If you cannot remove the puppy, call the doctor.

### **Behavior of the Mother**

During whelping and nursing, your pet may not be her usual self. She may be very nervous and filled with a sense of protectiveness for her new family. Any aggression she may exhibit usually fades as time passes.

Some mothers may need to have the puppies placed next to nipples to encourage nursing. Puppies usually will begin nursing within a few hours after birth.

### **Notify the Doctor if Any of the Following Occur**

- You cannot remove a puppy lodged in the birth canal
- There is strong, persistent labor for 30 minutes without delivery of a pup
- There is weak, intermittent labor for 6 hours without delivery of any puppies.

- It has been more than 4 hours since the last birth and it is probable that more puppies are still inside.
- There is greenish-black discharge and no labor or puppies within 3-4 hours. The greenish-black color is normal, but such discharge should be followed very soon by the delivery of the pups.
- The pregnancy lasts more than 65 days from the last breeding.
- Very swollen, red, and painful mammary glands with a darker grey milk color may indicate an infected gland (mastitis) and should be seen immediately by your veterinarian

### **Miscellaneous information**

- A greenish to bloody discharge is normal for several days to even a couple of weeks following whelping. This discharge should gradually decrease over time. If it does not then call your veterinarian.
- C-sections are routinely done in some breeds of dogs, and are generally very successful. Brachycephalic breeds (short faces and broad heads) are the breeds most likely to need a c-section, but other breeds may also need this if the labor is prolonged or a pup is stuck in the canal and the mother can no longer continue with labor.
- Puppies should double their body weight within the first 10-14 days of life and generally nurse about every 4-6 hours. Supplemental feeding is generally not necessary.