

SPRING/
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A twin pregnancy detected on ultrasound.

SUMMER TIME IS MATING TIME

BY DAVID O'BRIEN

Now that we are moving into the warmer months and the days are getting longer (hooray!), we are fast approaching the time of the year, where many of you are considering getting your mares in foal. Regardless of whether you are planning to have your mare served by a local stallion or using fresh chilled semen for AI, the team at VETPlus is here to assist you, and here is how...

Local semen/stallion sourcing

With our knowledge of the local equine clients we may be able to assist you in contacting potential suppliers of servicing stallions or semen.

Advice on advancing onset of breeding and synchronisation

Optimal natural fertility is between November and March, and this is largely due to the increased daylight length stimulating centres in the brain which kicks the reproductive organs into gear. Manipulation of the breeding cycle can be achieved with the use of medications in association with ultrasound examinations to reduce number of visits and inseminations required.

Pre Insemination Ultrasound scanning

Prior to inseminating your mare, we need to ensure the ovary has a fully developed follicle, as there is no point in wasting time and semen on mares who are not physiologically "hot to trot". Teasing behaviour will indicate if the mare is in season but this phase can last 5 to 7 days. Fertility (likelihood of having a successful mating) is highest in the 30 hour window that starts 24 hours before ovulation and goes to 6 hours after ovulation. Ultrasound examination of the uterus and ovaries can help us determine if ovulation is imminent, and therefore we can verify the best time to serve/inseminate. This potentially reduces the number of services/inseminations required, which is of benefit to both the stallion and the mare. Adequate facilities to perform scans are essential. A shaded stock, crush or something similar to fully restrain the mare, a table for equipment (ultrasound machine), and a power point close by are essential. Shade on hot sunny days is beneficial, as reading the ultrasound display with the sun beaming down on the screen is somewhat of a challenge.

Insemination

Again, an ultrasound scan is usually performed on the day of insemination to ensure the follicle on the ovary is close to releasing the egg. Insemination itself requires the highest level of hygiene. The mares tail will need to be wrapped and the vulva washed thoroughly and dried before the process begins. Depending on the fertility of the stallion, inseminations should be performed every second day. Daily inseminations may be necessary for stallions with known poorer fertility.

Pregnancy scanning/palpation

Pregnancy scanning and palpation identifies if mating or insemination has been successful, and whether the early pregnancy is progressing well. We will typically suggest to palpate and/or re-scan the mare 2 or 3 times at set intervals after mating. Detection of unsuccessful matings or inseminations can allow subsequent attempts to be planned well in advance. Scanning is also important for detection of twins. Although rare in mares, twin pregnancies lead to severe complications and the foals don't typically survive. The best stage at which to identify twin pregnancies is at 14-15 days, when the embryo is still motile. Currently we offer pregnancy scans out of our Taupo branch.

Blood testing

Pregnancy testing can also be carried out by means of hormone blood tests. These tests are indirect indicators of pregnancy, but can be misleading when used on their own and do not check for twinning. Depending on the stage of pregnancy, the hormones we choose to test for may vary. Although there are some disadvantages with blood testing for pregnancies, it can be a practical solution if there are no facilities present on the property or if the owner does not want the mare to be rectally examined.

So however you wish to breed your mare, and whatever your breeding requirements, VETPlus is happy to help you achieve what you want the most, a healthy foal.

HORSE DENTISTRY—PART TWO

Mod. from 

What does routine dental rasping ('floating') involve?

The process of removing potentially harmful sharp points and edges from the cheek teeth is called rasping or 'floating'. This is undertaken on a regular basis depending on the age of the horse and the health of the mouth. Before rasping the teeth, a thorough examination of the mouth should first be performed. This can only be done properly by using a device called a speculum or 'gag' to safely keep the mouth open. This allows the practitioner to look and feel inside the horse's mouth to check not only for sharp points but also for other problems such as broken or missing teeth. Only once the mouth has been examined will the teeth be rasped. There are many different types of dental rasps available and we have a range of instruments to allow work to be performed on teeth in various parts of the mouth. Horses generally tolerate rasping of the teeth very well, but to ensure a thorough job is done, we sedate the horses under 'standing' sedation.

How often should routine dentistry be carried out?

Although it is sensible for foals' teeth to be checked at a young age to pick up any developmental abnormalities, often the first thorough dental examination and rasping occurs at 18 months to 2 years of age. Young horses can have surprisingly sharp teeth and it is wise to make the mouth comfortable prior to breaking-in. The frequency of dental examinations varies according to individual needs but as a general rule of thumb more frequent examinations are necessary in younger animals. Horses will shed 12 cheek teeth caps and 12 incisor caps and erupt 36 or more permanent teeth before the age of 5. This 'flurry' of activity frequently means that there are sharp or loose teeth in the young mouth and 6 monthly examinations are commonplace. When horses gain a mature mouth often annual visits are sufficient to keep the mouth comfortable and balanced, however some horses need more frequent care, particularly if there are any abnormalities of growth such as overlong or displaced teeth. When horses reach old age it is very important not to be too aggressive when rasping in order to preserve what grinding surface area remains in the mouth. For this reason, management of old horses often simply involves checking for loose or obviously diseased teeth.

What should I do about my horse's wolf teeth?

Wolf teeth are small teeth that sit immediately in front of the first upper cheek teeth and much more rarely the first lower cheek teeth. They come in many shapes and sizes and are usually present by 12-18 months of age although not all horses have them. Most of the time wolf teeth do not cause problems, but traditionally owners and riders have considered them to be a potential cause of biting problems. When wolf teeth are taken out it is usually because of this historical dislike for them rather than any demonstrable problems. Having said that wolf teeth can sometimes be sharp or mal-erupted and it can seem illogical to make the rest of the horse's mouth comfortable but leave a troublesome wolf tooth in place where it might pinch the cheek with bit pressure. Sometimes the presence of wolf teeth can impair the thorough rasping of the first cheek tooth and in these cases, removal of wolf teeth is also justified. Removal of wolf teeth is sometimes simple and sometimes difficult. At VETPlus we remove wolf teeth under 'standing' sedation and use local nerve blocks to make the procedure painfree for the horse.

How accurately can the age of horses and ponies be determined by examining their teeth?

In the past it has been common to age horses by the appearance of their incisor teeth. The eruption and appearance of various features of these teeth have been associated with particular ages, however it is now known that the technique is inherently inaccurate. A reasonable degree of accuracy exists up until the age of around 10 years, however after that it is best to talk in age groups of 5 or so years. - Gone are the days when a veterinarian would confidently state the exact age of a horse by inspecting its incisors.

What about 'caps'?

'Caps' typically refer to the thin remnants of the deciduous (baby) cheek teeth. Horses will lose a total of 12 cheek teeth caps generally between the ages of 2.5 and 4.5 years of age. Most of the time these are shed perfectly naturally, however occasionally a young horse will salivate or show signs of mouth pain due to a partially dislodged or loose cap. Removal of these is typically simple and readily undertaken at a routine dental examination. Premature removal of caps is not advisable as it can damage the underlying 'adult' tooth.



A 'gag' helps us to keep the mouth open safely for a thorough examination.



Large wolf tooth present in front of the premolars



Caps may be easily removed as in this case.

LAMINITIS WARNING!

BY ANDREW SCURR

With all the lush grass around at the moment, we would like to warn our horse clients about the high risk of laminitis, especially for ponies. At this time of year, the pasture is high in sugar levels (Fructans), which is the predominant trigger of the laminitis cases we currently see.

Rapidly growing pasture species such as rye grasses naturally have a much higher concentration of Fructans than Timothy or Cocksfoot species, and as such these pasture types pose a much greater risk of laminitis. Fructans are highly soluble sugars in plants that are produced by photosynthesis. On sunny days and in the afternoons, their concentration is at the highest levels. During the night, Fructans are used by the plant and so, by the morning the Fructan levels in pastures have reduced. Measures to take for at risk horses and ponies in these situations are to avoid grazing these pastures - hence supplementing with more hay and using grazing muzzles to reduce grass intake.

FOAL PRESCHOOL

BY PAULA GOLD

What can I teach my foal?

This is a question that first time foal owners often ask themselves. Here is an overview of what you could be doing with your foal from a young age on.

In many ways a young foal is very much like a little child. Their early experiences stay with them for a lifetime and can make for either a well-adjusted, trusting companion or a horse that will pose a constant challenge.

The first thing to remember is, that even though foals are cute and we cannot wait to get our hands on them, they are also very powerful and quick. So we must first approach every aspect of foal handling with care, and remember our safety as well.

Safety Tips

To keep safely out of the kicking zone when working around a foal, stay in front of the midline and out of reach of its hind legs. Once the foal is calm and comfortable, you can move around him.

Also I find having the mare in close and quiet, will help keep her baby quiet as well. Pay close attention to any maternal warnings that the mare may be sending you, as a stressed out mother will cause the baby to stress out as well.

I like to handle the foal even before it is standing if possible, but definitely within the first few days after it is born. At this stage you are getting the foal used to being touched and handled. This is of great help, if there are complications following his birth, and you or a vet needs to get up and close to him.

I start by rubbing the foals neck, back and chest. If the foal moves away, quietly move with it and try to keep your hand on it, also remembering to talk in a soothing voice. If the foal accepts this, move on to rubbing and touching its head and legs. The key at this stage is to stay patient and calm. It is all about **BABY STEPS!**

Once the foal is happy and comfortable about being handled all over, you should now go about putting a halter on it. Take your time with this, let the foal sniff and explore the halter. Rub the halter all over the foal behind its ears and along its neck. If the foal accepts this, place the nose band on and off his nose. Once he is relaxed and calm, then attempt to buckle the halter in place. If the foal is not happy, go back a step and keep rubbing him with it, and take it on and off his nose.

FRIENDLY, FIRM AND FAIR are the key words to remember. Always stay calm around a foal. If it gets scared, do not back away. Just stop what you are doing for a moment, and speak to him in a calm voice (naturally, if the situation gets dangerous, it is a different story – then you can back away). Once the foal is calm again, slowly work your way back to what you were last doing, ensuring the foal is happy along the way.

One big thing to remember also, is not to play with your foal like you would with a puppy. As an example, getting them to chase you across a paddock by running - this may be a fun game when they are little, but not such a great game when they are big. If you do not command a certain amount of respect from the start, you are likely to get hurt. You do not have to be mean to the foal, just be firm.

From this point on, you can now start to teach the foal to lead, pick up its feet and so much more. Just be consistent and firm and calm, and take your time with him. Day after day repetition is a huge help, and a foal will quickly learn what you are trying to teach him.

If you spend ten minutes on one thing you will have a higher success rate, than if you are spending an hour on lots of different things only half taught!

STAFF NEWS

Congratulations to Karl and Anna Weaver on the safe arrival of Mercedes—a brave little girl joining the scrum of boys. After threatening each time to get his calving chains out, Karl almost had the opportunity this time as they arrived at hospital with only 18 minutes to spare!



A warm welcome to Kodie Hyde, who has joined the Rural work force. You can read more about Kodie on page 4.

Congratulations to Nicola on becoming a Grandmother to a lovely colt foal 'Espresso', born on the 25th of October, pictured below at 1 day old.



**“...FRIENDLY,
FIRM AND FAIR
are the key words
to remember...”**



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MEET OUR NEWEST STAFF MEMBER KODIE HYDE

Kodie moved to Rotorua in August, to start work at VETPlus in September. She works mainly out of the SPCA clinic, but joins the Rural team on Wednesdays. On occasion, she has also joined the vets in field, helping with calf disbudding.

Most of her family has moved across the ditch, but her Dad still resides in Waikato, and she has got some family in the Tauranga region as well. Her best childhood memory is from Pukehina beach, visiting her Nana and Grandad, with long walks, sand, fires on the beach, fishing and good fun swimming in the ocean! Her pets include a Collie Cross called Kya and a couple of cats, Turbo and Pudding.



In a typical day at work, Kodie answers lots of phone calls, books in consults and surgeries, organises stock, does the odd farm job, and learns everything there is to know about large animals at Rural.

Kodie's background is two years of nursing at a small animal clinic in Hamilton, and before then a year at Rotorua Central City vets while studying. She loves the great team spirit at VETPlus.

Kodie has always loved animals, and she enjoys the fact that she as a vet nurse gets paid to do what she enjoys the most!

Her hobbies include visiting local markets, travelling around, hiking, going to the beach, catching up with friends, gardening, baking and snowboarding.

About her most exciting moment ever, she says: "I'm easily excited! This year I was a bridesmaid for a best mate, did a skydive, and watched a corn cob removal from a dog."

For her future, Kodie envisions living on a nice little lifestyle block somewhere.

Finally, when asked what people wouldn't know about her, Kodie answers: "I fail often at donating blood – they can never get a good vein."



Go the All Blacks!

Now that the All Blacks are world champs, we thought we would celebrate this with a picture of Danny Boy from Clevedon Animal Farm, Papakura, who took the field against England last month. There's a new training trick for someone to take up!



If you have health insurance, why wouldn't you do the same for your best friend?

HORSE INSURANCE

BY NICOLA MCDONALD

Some of you may have noticed that our consult dockets now contain a section regarding horse insurance. We may also have asked you on a few occasions if your horse is insured. Horse insurance is a great way to safeguard yourself from a significant financial burden at a time, when you are emotionally stressed out about your horse's illness or injury. Veterinary procedures for serious illnesses or injuries can be very costly, and should the worst happen, and you are left with no option but euthanasia, insurance can cover some of the strain of losing your horse, albeit not the emotional one.

Individual insurance companies offer a wide variety of policies, which cater for the needs of all sorts of horse people, whether you breed horses for living or just enjoy the occasional hack in the Redwoods with your friends. The options for coverage are wide ranged, from mortality cover only to 'loss of use' for competition horses, or medical cover (pays a percentage of veterinary costs above the excess). Many more options are available for the individual horse person with specific needs.

Some insurance groups ask for a 'veterinary certificate for insurance' to establish that the horse is in general good health before they can initiate cover. This is a straight forward procedure similar to an ID certificate.

If your horse should fall ill or sustain an injury while insured, the insurance company needs to be contacted immediately to enable a future claim to be paid out.

We strongly recommend insurance for horses, and we are happy to advise you on insurance companies that might cater for your needs.