XL Vets Equine

Fact Sheet

Equine Abortion

Most mares that conceive remain healthy throughout pregnancy and foal normally when expected, but, unfortunately, a few mares will lose their foal either early or late in pregnancy.

Early embryonic loss occurs relatively commonly in the first couple of months of pregnancy, usually because the embryo is not developing correctly or the uterus (womb) is not as healthy as it should be. Older foetuses may be aborted by the mare for a number of reasons (see causes). If the foetus is less than five months of age, it may be fully resorbed by the uterus so there is no external evidence of this miscarriage. Over five months of age, the foal will be expelled by the mare, along with the placenta and associated fluids. If this occurs outside, it may go unnoticed, as it can be a relatively 'clean' process and the foetus may be removed by wildlife.

Causes:

- abnormal development of the foal or placenta;
- infection of the uterus through the cervix or via the bloodstream or respiratory tract;
- severe illness , malnutrition or stress in the mare;
- twins – it is rare for twins to survive to term and be born healthy;
- drug-induced e.g. corticosteroid use.

Infectious causes of abortion:

- viral - equine herpesvirus 1 (EHV-1) is the most common respiratory virus causing abortion;
- bacterial - often streptococcal infections such as strangles *(Streptococcus equi equi*);
- fungal - quite rare in the UK, more common in warmer climates.

CLINICAL SIGNS:

- vulval discharge
- milk running from teats
- straining by the mare
- presence of foetus or placenta in stable/field.

If your mare is showing any of these signs she should immediately be isolated from other in foal mares and you should contact your vet to come and examine her. Equine herpesvirus can be spread via infected foetal fluids and aborted material

XLEquine Equine Abortion

Breeding, Foaling & Foals

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KEY POINTS:

- Abortion, especially in the early stages of pregnancy, may go unnoticed.
- Signs of impending abortion include vulval discharge and running milk.
- Equine herpesvirus is an infectious cause of abortion and can spread to other pregnant mares. Vaccination during pregnancy can help prevent the disease.
- Careful management of the brood mare can assist in the prevention of abortion.

GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES CAN HELP PREVENT ABORTION IN THE BROOD MARE

DIAGNOSIS

If the cause of the abortion is not known then it may be advisable to investigate the likely cause, particularly if other pregnant mares live on the premises. Abortion investigation usually involves post mortem examination of the foetus, placenta, and chord together with blood samples and swabs from the mare. Investigations will normally reach diagnosis in cases of infectious abortion but in a reasonable proportion of cases no diagnosis is found.

Prevention:

- good nutrition, healthy low-stress lifestyle with moderate amount of exercise – the mare should be 'fit not fat';
- clean environment;
- avoiding exposure to horses which frequently travel to shows, training days, hunts, etc. to reduce risk of respiratory infection;
- vaccination against EHV-1,4 which causes abortion late in pregnancy – usually done at five, seven and nine months of pregnancy;
- two ultrasound scans to diagnose twins before day 35 of pregnancy;
- check with your vet if your mare would benefit from a Caslick's procedure, which stitches up part of the vulva to try to prevent faecal contamination.

If you are concerned about your mare during pregnancy please contact your XLVets Equine vet for advice

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XLEquine is a novel and exciting initiative conceived from within the veterinary profession made up of independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout the United Kingdom, members of XLEquine are committed to working together for the benefit of all their clients.

For further information contact your local XLEquine practice:

www.xlequine.co.uk