

# SOUTH EAST COUNTRY VETS

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## CARING FOR THE PREGNANT MOTHER

The normal length of canine pregnancy varies from 58-72 days. On average it is 63 days from the date of being mated to giving birth (whelping). *Note: Progesterone testing can help narrow down which day they will whelp, for more information see our Progesterone fact sheet.*

### VACCINATIONS

Mothers provide immunity to their puppies via colostrum (the milk produced in the first few hours after birth). To ensure not only the safety of your bitch but also the unborn puppies, an annual vaccination program should be followed. The bitch should be vaccinated just prior to mating as vaccinating whilst pregnant is not ideal.

### INTESTINAL WORMS, HEARTWORM & FLEA PREVENTION

Intestinal worms can be passed from mother to puppies in two different ways – either a faecal-oral route or through the milk. For this reason, the bitch should be wormed as follows:

- 2wks prior to mating
- 2wks prior to whelping
- worm the bitch when worming the puppies at 2, 4 and 6 weeks of age.

Ensure you treat the bitch and puppies for fleas regularly as these can spread tapeworm. Frontline spray is safe to use on puppies older than 2 days. A regular heartworm prevention program through either an annual vaccination or monthly tablets is essential for the pregnant mother.

### NUTRITION

When a complete and balanced diet is fed during pregnancy and lactation, no supplements should be necessary. It is best to start feeding the bitch a good quality puppy food from the time she is pregnant. A standard adult dog food *does not* provide the extra nutrients that she needs for growing and feeding puppies. As the pregnancy progresses, the bitches appetite may decrease and it may be necessary to feed her a palatable wet food and to feed small meals several times a day. We recommend Royal Canin Starter (Mother and Baby) or Advance Puppy for both the bitch and then the puppies as they move onto solids.

### HOUSING

It is ideal to provide a designated whelping box for the bitch at least a week or two prior to whelping so that she can get comfortable being there. The area should contain the following:

- an area/box/cage that is suitable in size and can be easily cleaned with adequate sides so that the pups cannot crawl or roll out of it
- adequate ventilation and protection from extreme heat/cold
- somewhere quiet so that the puppies are not disturbed
- clean bedding (blankets and towels)

# THE WHELPING GUIDE

Whelping is the process of giving birth to puppies and is divided into three key stages.

## **Stage 1 – relaxation and dilation of the cervix**

This stage may sometimes be missed by an owner as some bitches may not show all of these signs.

This stage begins with the onset of contractions and ends with the cervix being completely open and lasts between 6-12hours. Bitches may appear restless, nervous, have a reduced appetite, shiver, pant, pace, vomit, tear up bedding material and start to 'nest'.

## **Stage 2 – production of young**

This stage begins with the pup entering the birth canal and rupture of the water bag and ends with the birth of the last pup. The bitch will show obvious contractions in her attempts to deliver the pups. The time between the start of stage 2 and delivery of the first pup varies but is generally less than 4 hours. The time between delivery of each pup will vary from 20-60min to 2-3hrs.

## **Stage 3 – delivery of the placenta**

This stage begins with the end of delivery and ends with the passage of all placentae. If the bitch has multiple pups she may alternate between stages 2 and 3.

## **HOW DO I KNOW IF MY BITCH IS HAVING PROBLEMS?**

**Prolonged Gestation (pregnancy)** – If the pregnancy lasts longer than 70d from the first mating then the puppies may become oversized. Early separation of the placenta may also occur and this can result in deaths of the puppies.

**Failure of Normal Labour** – Call your veterinarian for advice if there is:

- 30min of persistent, strong abdominal contractions without a pup being born
- 2-3 hours of weak contractions without a pup being born
- More than 1 hour between pups being born

**Foetal Distress** – If there are multiple stillborn pups there is a concern for the rest of the litter that is not yet born.

**Maternal Distress** – If the bitch is crying and displaying signs of pain whilst licking at her vulva when she is delivering in conjunction with no signs or progress of delivery this is cause for concern.

Note: Some bitches prefer to be left alone as much as possible where as others don't mind observation. The fluids and matter associated with whelping can often be dark in colour (black/green). This is normal as is the bitch eating the afterbirth and fluids. If you need to touch the bitch (e.g. to move the pups if they are being squashed), then wear gloves whilst doing so.

# THE NURSING PERIOD

After she has delivered the pups, continue feeding a complete and balanced puppy food diet that is higher in calcium (important for lactating bitches). Veterinary attention may be required after birth if any of the following signs are noticed:

- Normal fluid leaking from the vulva continues for more than 10 days
- Swollen, red and painful teats; unwilling to nurse pups
- Muscle trembling, shaking, whining, salivating, inability to stand and a decrease in milk production

*This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation.*

*It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your pet's health.*