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## Whelping and Queening

### **Labor:**

The signs of pre-labor are nervousness, restlessness, panting, digging in places (nesting), and loss of appetite. These signs may appear as far as two days prior to labor but are usually seen 8 to 24 hours before the onset of true labor. Labor starts when abdominal "presses" (which are uterine contractions) begin. This looks as if the mother is trying to have a bowel movement. Once true labor begins, a puppy/kitten should be born within two hours. If no puppy/kitten is born within two hours, a veterinarian should examine the dog/cat. The intervals between births can be quite variable, ranging from a few minutes to several hours.

### **Birth:**

The puppies/kittens can be born either head first or feet first. Each puppy/kitten is covered with a slippery membrane, which needs to be removed after birth to allow breathing. Normally the mother will chew through the membrane and begin licking the puppy's/kitten's face and chest to stimulate breathing. If she does not assist the puppy/kitten within a minute or two after birth, you can tear the membrane open and dry the newborn's face with a clean dry towel. Try to clear any mucous away from the newborn mouth. Vigorous rubbing is sufficient to get the newborn breathing. However, it is better not to interfere unless a puppy/kitten is in danger. Some mothers resent outside assistance and will not care for the puppies/kittens if too much help is given.

### **Placenta or Afterbirth:**

Attached to each puppy's/kitten's abdomen at birth is an umbilical cord that is connected to the afterbirth or placenta. The afterbirth may be delivered with the puppy/kitten or the cord may break leaving the afterbirth in the pelvic canal. It is important to note whether afterbirth accompanies each puppy/kitten. If not, a veterinarian needs to examine the mother within 24 hours. The mother will chew through the umbilical cord once the puppy/kitten is born. Try to remove the afterbirth(s) before she has a chance to eat them, as some animals will develop diarrhea after ingesting the afterbirth. If the mother does not chew through the umbilical cord, contact a veterinarian.

### **Care of Pups and Kittens:**

Newborns need to be kept warm since they do not regulate their body temperature well until they are several days old. Hot water bottles along with a clean, dry, draft free, well insulated quarters are the safest way to keep puppies/kittens warm. Heating pads can burn newborns and should not be used. Milk may appear from the mammary glands from 4 to 5 days to just before birth. After birth, the puppies/kittens should start nursing

within the first hour or two. Tail docking and dewclaw removal, if desired, should be performed at between 3 and 5 days of age (for puppies only). Call for an appointment as soon as possible after the puppies are born if these procedures are needed.

### **Care of Mother:**

Ideally, the mother should be clean before whelping; her coat free of mats and excess hair trimmed from the genital area and teats if necessary. After the puppies/kittens are born, wash the teats and if necessary bathe the genital area and dry gently. Mothers are sometime reluctant to leave their young and may not go out to relieve themselves or eat for several days. Take your dog/cat outside briefly to encourage elimination.

Retained placentas should be suspected if all afterbirth were not accounted for during delivery. Normally there is a dark red or reddish-brown discharge after whelping, which indicates all afterbirth has been expelled. A bright red discharge may indicate bleeding. A green or greenish-brown, foul smelling discharge appearing 2 to 3 days after birth and/or a fever indicate retained and decomposing tissue and require immediate veterinary care.

### **Summary of Reasons to Seen the Doctor:**

Pre-birth:

- Failure to begin labor after 65 to 67 days of the pregnancy.

During Whelping or Queening:

- True labor, that is unproductive (no puppies/kittens born) after two hours.
- There is no labor and there is a green discharge.
- Puppy/kitten or afterbirth is visible at opening of birth canal for more that 15 minutes without being delivered.

Post-Partum (following birth):

- Failure to pass the afterbirth with each puppy/kitten.
- Puppies/kittens that are not suckling within a few hours of birth
- Mother in not eating within 24 hours of delivering puppies and kittens.
- Tail docking/dewclaw removal on puppies 3 to 5 day old.