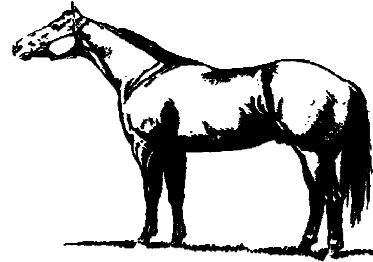


## **Animal Science Horse Information Series**

Phone: 865-974-7294  
e-mail: [fharper@utk.edu](mailto:fharper@utk.edu)  
<http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu>



### **KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON NEWBORN FOALS**

**Dr. Frederick Harper  
Extension Horse Specialist  
Department of Animal Science  
University of Tennessee**

Parents always keep a close watch on their children, especially as they begin to crawl and walk. It is also common for a parent to know that their child is not feeling well by observing their actions and behavior.

Owners of newborn foals should be keen observers as well.

With mares foaling and being re-mated, and horses being prepared for show and performance in the spring, it is easy to neglect newborn foals.

Owners need to observe each foal's action and behavior two or three times daily. Newborn foals are susceptible to numerous diseases, and their curious nature and active behavior can also result in injuries.

One must know what is normal in foals to be able to better spot problems.

Foals are generally very active and gregarious. As with children, they like to play

with each other. Some naturally play rougher than others. So, it is advisable to keep foals of approximately the same age and size grouped together, if possible.

Foals tend to buddy with foals from mares that get along together. If two mares are observed to be together often, their foals will likely also play together.

Broodmares tend to imprint their foals with their disposition. More aggressive mares usually have more aggressive foals. Timid or shy mares tend to have timid foals.

Foals nurse several times daily. A full, hot, distended or leaking udder indicates that the foal has not nursed, suggesting that the foal is sick or injured. Checking the broodmares and foals several times a day indicate if a foal has not been nursing recently.

A foal that is observed nursing often but not gaining weight may not be getting adequate milk from its dam. This is a common problem when broodmares graze infected fescue pastures in late pregnancy. Maiden mares with their first foal often do not have any or enough milk.

If a creep feeder is used, observe the foal eating. Foals with a temperature usually do not have a good appetite.

If other foals are playing and active, check a foal that is lying down. It may be sick or injured. Rarely will a foal lie down when others, especially its buddies, are being rambunctious.

A foal standing by itself or very close to its dam with its head down and ears drooped requires attention. Such a foal probably has a fever. The normal temperature of foals will be 99 to 102 degree F. Respiration rate after birth is in the range of 60 to 80 beats per minute and will be 20 to 40 beats/minute at the end of the first week.

**The heart rate will be 70 to 100 beats per minute an hour after birth, and it will drop to 40 to 80 beats per minute in the normal foal.**

**Foals should be of normal size for their age with a bright, glossy hair coat. A dull hair coat may indicate an internal parasite problem.**

**Foals that grind their teeth and lie on their back with legs in the air usually indicates stomach ulcers. Yes, young foals can have ulcers.**

**Some signs are obvious: wet and stained buttocks usually indicate diarrhea. Nasal discharge or cough notes a respiratory problem. A lame foal may have been injured, have an unsoundness or an infection.**

**When you observe any abnormal behavior, action or behavior in a foal, it should be carefully inspected to determine the problem so it can be treated properly.**

**Learn to be a good observer for your foals' sake.**

**###**

**4/05**