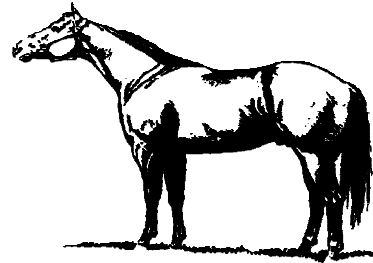


Animal Science Horse Information Series

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PREGNANCY CHECKING BROODMARES

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Technology is having an impact on all our lives. Some products used in the past are no longer available. They have been replaced with “something better.” Do you remember the old dial phone? These have been replaced by cellular phones.

Well, horse breeding farms also have been invaded with technology. Ultrasound is a technology that makes things better for the broodmare owner, breeding farm manager and veterinarian. Prior to ultrasound, pregnancy checking was done by manual rectal palpation and still is in some situations.

An ultrasound examination can accurately diagnose pregnancy at 14-18 days after a mare’s last breeding. Normally, manual palpation begins at 18-21 days post-breeding. A pregnancy cannot be actually diagnosed by palpation this early. One can only tell that the

uterine and cervical tone is consistent with pregnancy. So, an ultrasound examination removes some of the guesswork.

It is very important that broodmares be pregnancy checked at 14-18 days after breeding and again about 40-days of pregnancy. You may ask, “But, why pregnancy check broodmares so early?” Knowing whether a mare is or is not pregnant is important for proper breeding and management.

It is critical to identify broodmares that have been bred but are not pregnant since some will not return to estrus or “heat.” This often occurs with broodmares nursing a foal. If a broodmare is not pregnant, she can be treated and returned to estrus before the end of the breeding season.

Signs of uterine infections can also be determined by an ultrasound examination. The sooner that it is known that a broodmare is not pregnant the quicker treatment and rebreeding can begin.

Early pregnancy checking can also indicate a reproductive problem with a stallion. If stallion problems are not detected until late in the breeding season, it can be disastrous. Some of the broodmares bred to him will not be pregnant, and there will not be time to breed them to another stallion late in the season.

Twin pregnancies are not desirable and can be detected by ultrasound examinations. Management of twin pregnancies is more successful if determined before 18 days. Since twin pregnancies are more prevalent in Thoroughbreds, these mares should be checked at about 14 days. Other breeds can be checked at 18 days.

An ultrasound examination can also be used to evaluate the size of the follicle, aiding

in estimating the time of ovulation in non-pregnant mares. It is extremely important to breed mares at the proper time for maximum efficiency of pregnancy. Where shipped semen is used, it is imperative to know when a mare will ovulate.

While an early pregnancy examination at 14-18 days is important, broodmares also need to be checked again before they are 40-days pregnant. Why reexamine broodmares so soon again? The first 40-days after breeding are most critical because early embryonic death losses occur in the first 40-days of pregnancy.

Mares diagnosed as pregnant at an earlier pregnancy check (14-18 days) may not be in-foal at 40-days. Once diagnosed as pregnant, mares are often not observed as closely or consistently. The pressure of the breeding season causes attention to be focused on mares that are not pregnant.

If mares designated as pregnant show signs of estrus (heat) again, they may not be observed. Some mares do not exhibit estrus signs even when they are not pregnant, especially if lactating.

Mares that lose a pregnancy after 40-days often do not return to a normal estrous cycle due to the hormone, Equine Chorionic Gonadotropin (eCG), secreted by the endometrial cups in the mare's uterus. Such mares will not show signs of estrus. Mares between 40-150 days of pregnancy that abort fit this category. So, mares should be pregnancy checked again before they are 40-days pregnant.

Barren mares did not have foals this year and are highly likely to lose their current pregnancies. So they can be rebred, if necessary, they must be pregnancy checked before 40-days.

A pregnancy check at this time gives the breeder confidence. When a mare carries a pregnancy past 40-days, the chance of pregnancy loss decreases sharply. If not pregnant, the breeder has an opportunity to get the mare ready for re-breeding before the breeding season ends. A negative pregnancy check is an important management tool at this time in the breeding season.

Mares noted as pregnant at 14-18 days but are not pregnant now can be returned to an estrous cycle with proper use of hormones. Caution should be exercised since hormones are easily misused.

Early embryonic loss is quite high in older mares, 15 years of age or older. It is essential that older broodmares be pregnancy checked before they reach 40-days post-breeding.

Mares at breeding farms can be easily pregnancy checked as a veterinarian is usually present every other day. But, pregnant mares sent home may go unchecked unless the owner makes arrangement for this procedure.

Pregnancy checking is a cost-effective management tool, well worth the time and expense, and may insure a foal next spring. It is a lot cheaper to pregnancy check a broodmare now than feed her for another 300+ days and not have a foal next spring.

If you need your mare pregnancy checked or have questions about when your broodmare should be pregnancy checked, contact your veterinarian.

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