

Foster Office: (303) 751-5772 Ext 7290

Foster Emergency Line: (720) 334-1422

What to Expect When Your Foster Dog is Expecting

Normal gestation period for a dog is between 58 and 68 days. At the Dumb Friends League, you can expect that your foster dog will be around 2/3 of the way through her pregnancy by the time she arrives in your home. This means that by the time she gets to your house, she will have about 2-3 weeks before she goes into labor. She will likely be visibly pregnant (distended abdomen, developed teats) and will have had an exam and x-rays to confirm the presence of fetuses. The Foster Department will let you know how many puppies your foster dog is expected to deliver. Normally, nature takes its course and dogs can deliver puppies without issue. However, dystocia (difficulty with birth) does happen and it is important to know signs of a potential emergency so that the medical team can intervene if necessary.

Housing/Whelping box

When you take your foster dog home, please take some time to orient her to her new surroundings. It is important to provide her with a quiet room and whelping box that she can use to deliver her pups when she is ready. She can also use this space for nursing and raising pups after they are delivered. Even though you provide a whelping box, your foster dog may choose another area of your house to give birth. As long as the location is a safe one, please refrain from moving your dog to another place once the labor process begins. You can move her to a more suitable area once all pups have been delivered and are starting to nurse.

Diet

During this time, it is important that your foster dog is fed a high-quality diet and be fed about twice as much as she is normally fed. Once your foster dog has given birth, she will require about three times the amount she is normally fed; a high calorie growth/puppy diet is best for nursing mother dogs. The foster coordinators can help you to determine the amount and type of food you should be feeding your foster dog. Feeding multiple small meals throughout the day is ideal, especially if the litter size is large. The DFL does not recommend additional vitamins or supplements; calcium supplementation can actually harm pregnant dogs and is not recommended.

Exercise

Pregnant dogs benefit from regular activity. Please take your pregnant foster dog on short, 5-10 minute walks multiple times a day. Swimming is also a safe activity for pregnant dogs. Please avoid strenuous exercise, including agility and running. Your foster dog's exercise tolerance will likely decrease as her pregnancy progresses.

Isolation

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Please isolate your pregnant foster dog from other dogs during her pregnancy and for 3 weeks after delivery to help prevent contraction of herpesvirus. Herpesvirus can be spread between dogs via direct contact. This virus rarely causes any symptoms in adult dogs, but will cause abortion, still birth, and neonatal death in puppies.

Labor

Once your foster dog is ready to give birth, she will go through several stages of labor.

Stage 1 (Typically lasts 6-12 hours): During the first stage of labor, uterine contractions begin. Your dog may begin panting, become restless, anxious, and exhibit nesting behavior. They may also vomit or dig at the ground. Please make sure your foster dog has access to fresh water and her whelping box during this time, although she may choose to give birth in another location.

Stage 2 and 3: During these stages of labor, contractions are visible as puppies are born. At the beginning of labor, contractions may be infrequent, weak, or incomplete and then get stronger as labor progresses. Puppies are usually born between 45-60 minutes apart. A reddish/brownish vaginal discharge is sometimes passed between puppies.

- You can check on the mother during the birthing process, but try not to disturb her as this can delay labor and birth.
- If a baby is visible in the birth canal and appears stuck and is not coming out easily, please call the foster department and bring the dog to the shelter. Do not forcibly attempt to remove a baby.
- Do not assist delivery by pulling on the head of a baby or on the umbilical cord as it exits the mother.
- Do not put your fingers in the birth canal as you can cause trauma or infection.
- **If notice blood or forest-green vaginal discharge, if your foster dog is actively straining for more than 30 minutes, or if she rests with no active contractions for more than 2 hours between puppies, please contact the Foster Department as your dog will need an examination from a veterinarian.**

Neonatal Puppy Care

- Puppies are born with a thin membrane covering their face and body. The mother dog usually removes this membrane with her teeth. If she has not done so within 1 minute of birth, you can gently remove the membrane yourself and then begin rubbing the puppy with a dry towel to help stimulate breathing.
- Some puppies may have a small amount of clear fluid coming from their mouths and nostrils. If a puppy is struggling to breathe, a pediatric suction bulb can be used to gently clear away the fluid. It is important to never swing the puppy to get rid of this fluid.

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- If the mother does not chew the umbilical cord, it can be tied with a piece of string or dental floss and cut on the far side of the knot (not the puppy-side). Once the puppy is crying and breathing on its own and the mother dog is not in distress, the puppy can be placed back with her.
- Never use a heating pad or external heating device on a medium or high setting; puppies have trouble regulating their body temperature and can easily overheat.
- It is not uncommon for some puppies to be stillborn or to die shortly after birth. If a puppy expires, please place it in a plastic bag and bring it to the Dumb Friends League.

Post-partum Care

What to do after birth: If the mother dog is nursing her pups well and if all pups are accounted for (if the number of puppies birthed matches the number of puppies suspected on pre-birth x-rays), you can let the mother dog rest and nurse her puppies. Please ensure that the mother is being fed about three times her normal diet in order to produce enough milk for her puppies.

- All puppies must receive dewormer at 2 weeks old
- All puppies must receive their first set of vaccines at 4 weeks old, and then boosted every two weeks after that.

Vaginal Discharge: Reddish brown vaginal discharge from the mother can continue for several weeks after a normal birth. If the mother is eating normally and is active, this isn't a problem. If she becomes lethargic, stops eating or begins to act sick, or if you notice a foul smell to the discharge, please call the Foster Department to schedule an appointment.

Eclampsia: Some new mothers can experience a condition called eclampsia in which their blood calcium levels drop to dangerously low levels. This is due to the large amount of calcium secreted in milk for the newborns causing a deficiency in the mother. Dogs with eclampsia can experience severe muscle tremors, difficulty walking and seizures. **If any of these signs are noted, please call the foster department immediately.** Eclampsia can happen anytime around birth, but is most common during peak milk production (2 to 4 weeks after birth).

Thank you for fostering for the Dumb Friends League!

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Foster Department at 303-751-5772 ext 7290.

Emergency # 303-696-0063