

What to Expect when your foster Dog is Expecting



Dogs are pregnant for approximately 63 days, or about two months. By the end of the first month, the heartbeats can be detected and during the second month is when most of the development starts to happen. Sometimes, we will get an ultrasound done at a local vet to try and verify pregnancy or to verify how far along the animal is, but this is usually only done in situations where we are worried about the health of the animal. For the most part, in the fostering world, we are giving our best guess on how far along these animals are.

Throughout the time that you have a pregnant foster, it'll mostly be like having any other adult dog foster, except for a few precautions you will need to take.

When you get them home...



You will want to make sure that your pregnant dog has a space all to her own, where other animals can't come into the room or bother them. It's important that your mom dog will feel as secure as possible in this space. You will want to make sure that you bathe your pregnant dog, if at all possible, prior to bringing them into the room for the first time. This will help prevent her from bringing in any potential diseases that she could have on her body present from transport.

In her space, you want to make sure that she has a baby pool setup with some newspapers and blankets. The baby pool and blankets will give her an area to feel safe and to start nesting as she gets closer to going into labor. You can have this baby pool in a dog run or an xpen, so that the mom has space outside of her pool to have her things, such as toys and food/water.

It's important to make sure that your momma feels comfortable and not unsafe in her new space. Use the days while you are waiting for her to deliver, to form a bond with her, so that she feels comfortable with you around once her pups arrive.



Supplies

Keep in mind, you'll want to make sure that you have some important supplies for your pregnant foster.

- 1.) Plastic baby pool for birthing.
 - 2.) You'll need to have dry **puppy** food on hand for your foster. Being pregnant and then nursing takes a LOT of calories. You'll want to make sure that your foster has constant access to calories.
 - 3.) Towels and sheets. Labor and the days that follow are *messy*. Instinct will make you want to give the mom and her newborns thick fluffy blankets, but most blankets and towels will be completely ruined during the birthing process, it's best to have "disposable" sheets and towels that you can just throw away after.
 - 4.) Floss with no flavoring or string as well as a clean pair of scissors. This is to tie off the umbilical cord later if needed, or to cut the umbilical cord if needed.
 - 5.) A kitchen scale for the days following delivery.
 - 6.) A hot water bottle incase you need to offer a heat source other than the mother dog.
- A notebook to record anything you may feel needed, such as weights of pups.

The Big Day

There's a few signs that your pregnant foster may give you that will let you know that she may be in the beginning stages of labor. Below are some signs that a dog would be entering into labor to watch out for. Remember though, not all dogs are the same. Some dogs will show none of these symptoms, some will show almost all. Even the most observant foster parent will sometimes be caught totally off guard with their pregnant foster suddenly having pups.

- 1.) Lack of Appetite day of labor
- 2.) Body temperature dropping to 99 degrees or lower within 24hrs of labor (Normal is around 102 degrees)
- 3.) Frequent and small defecations and urinations.
- 4.) Nesting behaviors in their pool. This can present as ripping up their blankets towels or rearranging their towels and blankets. Some dogs will bring items into the pool that they consider important, like toys or chews.

Unlike humans, dogs generally give birth easily and do not require assistance. Your role is to assist when necessary. Each puppy is born enclosed in its placental membrane, though a “dry birth” is possible, these pups should be watched carefully for difficulty breathing. In most cases, the mother tears this membrane off, sometimes eating it. If she does not, you will have to remove it, as puppies cannot survive for more than a few minutes before their supply of oxygen runs out.

The mother should also sever the umbilical cord as she cleans her pups. If she does not, it is up to you to snip the cord and tie it off with some unwaxed dental floss or string. The cord should be tied and cut about 1-2 inches from the puppy. Occasionally, the mother will bite the umbilical too close to the skin of the puppy. If you notice that a puppy is bleeding excessively from it's umbilical, you will want to hold pressure on the umbilical by pinching the cord to help stop the bleeding. You will also need to tie off the umbilical at this point as well.



You must also keep track of the number of placentas. A retained placenta can cause problems for the mother, so observe her carefully, and while you are at it, keep an eye on the pups to make sure they are all breathing normally and nursing. If one pup is far from the others,

you can move the pup directly back to the mother's stomach area so that it can be kept warm and nurse.

Possible Complications

Labor isn't pleasant for anyone, and that includes dogs. It's uncomfortable and hard work. However, it should not cause your foster extreme pain. If your dog is exhibiting symptoms of extreme discomfort, please call your foster coordinator.

If more than two hours pass in between the delivery of puppies and your foster is experiencing contractions, call your foster coordinator.

Pregnancy can be stressful for your foster as well as for you, but it doesn't have to be. It's important that you try and stay calm and relaxed during the whelping process. Your foster dog may become irritated if you are stressed. In the end, you need to let her be the one in control and you only need to be present in case you are needed, and so that you can regularly switch out any of soiled sheets or blankets as you are able to.

If your foster is in labor, you will want to give her space, but make sure that you are present and in close range to help if needed, so don't head to bed or work if it can be helped! Please let your foster coordinator know how many pups were born, their colors and their sex so that this can all be recorded into PetPoint.



Following the birth

You'll want to try and get beginning weights on all of the pups within the first 24hrs, if the mother dog will allow this. Record their weights in ounces. The first week after birth tend to be the most dangerous for pups, so you'll want to monitor their weights once a day to make sure that the pups are gaining. It is not abnormal for their birth weight to be greater than the weight they are on their second day.

You will need to make sure that the blankets in the pool are kept dry and clean to the best of your ability. You will also need to make sure that pups are not getting lost in the blankets. Up until about 3 weeks of age, pups cannot regulate their body temperature at all. They rely on their environment, siblings and mother to help keep them warm. If you are concerned about the area being too cool, investing in a reptile heatlamp is always a good start to help keep the whelping pool warm, just make sure that it's not too hot.

Monitor pups for having full bellies and that mom is getting enough food herself to keep producing milk for all of the pups.

For more information on Development in the first few weeks and what to expect in the days going forward, please see the section **Raising your Foster Pups from Birth to Surgery.**

