

Whelping Puppies

Whelping, the act of giving birth in the bitch or female dog, usually occurs with relatively few problems. The dog can usually get through it with little help from the owner. This sheet is to provide information to help you decide when an abnormality is present.

Most dogs whelp about 63 days after breeding (normal range = 58 to 71 days). To determine exactly when she will be due, start taking your dog's rectal temperature two to four times daily, starting about 55 days after breeding. To take your dog's temperature, you can use a human oral thermometer, either mercury or digital. Lubricate it with a little Vaseline, make sure the thermometer is inserted one to two inches within the anus, and leave it in for at least one minute. When the dog's temperature falls below 100° F (usually below 99° F), she should begin to whelp within 24 hours, and will probably begin in four to six hours.

You should have a place set aside for her that is warm and private. She may pick a place on her own and start nesting behavior there as she nears whelping. Following is a list of supplies you should have ready:

- clean, soft towels
- iodine
- thread or uncoated, unflavored dental floss
- bulb syringe
- White Bear Animal Hospital phone number: (651) 777-1393
- after hours phone number: Oakdale Emergency (651) 501-3766
- postal or small food scale

Labor starts with a long stage in which the uterine contractions begin, the birth canal relaxes and the cervix opens. The abdominal contractions may not be visible, but the dog will appear nervous and restless. She will be panting and may vomit. This stage lasts six to 12 hours.

The second stage will result in the actual birth of the puppies. Abdominal contractions or "pushing" will be evident at this stage. It is best to leave your bitch alone and provide a comfortable and warm spot for her to lie. Dogs can voluntarily stop giving birth if they are disturbed, so you should make sure she's in a quiet place.

The puppies will be born covered by a membrane that most dogs will rupture with their teeth. Most dogs will also bite through the umbilical cord of each pup. You will usually see fetal tissues protruding from the vulva before you actually see a pup born, but it may take several hours of hard abdominal contractions before you see fetal tissues protruding. Once you see fetal tissues protruding, she should have a pup within 30 minutes. It can take as long as two hours between puppies, but most dogs will have a pup every 30 to 60 minutes. Some bitches will deliver several puppies and then rest a while before finishing. Please call if you are unsure whether whelping is progressing normally.

If your dog is not cleaning her pups, you may need to step in and help them. You should dry each puppy with a towel, wipe clear all fluid from nose and mouth, and rub him vigorously to stimulate breathing. You can clean material from the nose and mouth with the bulb syringe. Resist the temptation to swing the puppy headfirst in order to clear the airway as this can cause small blood vessels in the brain to rupture. If the bitch does not sever the umbilical cord, you will have to do it. Wait for five to 10 minutes and then tie the umbilical cord in two places with

thread or dental floss. The closest tie should be one to two inches from the body of the pup. Cut between the two ties, thoroughly cleaning the end of the cord on the pup with iodine.

Leave the pups with the bitch. Even though she may not let them nurse, they need her warmth and physical contact.

The third and final stage of labor is that of expelling the placentas or afterbirth. The dog usually expels the placenta for each pup after it is born, and sometimes expels two placentas after delivering two pups. You should clean these away; there is no good physiological reason for allowing the bitch to eat them. Try to count to make sure you have seen a placenta for every pup as these may cause an infection if left in her uterus.

After whelping is completed, make sure the pups nurse within two to six hours. The first milk they receive contains colostrum which is very important in providing them with immunity to many common diseases. It is also very important to keep the puppies warm. They should be kept in an environment of around 85° F for the first several weeks of life. Be careful in your use of heating pads or heat lamps because it is very easy to burn the puppies' skin.

The mother may have a green to reddish brown vulvar discharge for up to three weeks after whelping. This is normal and is of no concern as long as it is not foul-smelling and she seems fine otherwise. You should continue to monitor the temperature of the mother for several weeks after whelping, at least once a day. It is normal for it to be slightly elevated (102.5 to 103° F) for two to three days after whelping. Inspect the mother's mammary glands daily to check for the presence of milk, abnormal swelling or discharge, or pain. Please call if you are concerned with what you see.

The puppies should be weighed at birth and daily thereafter. They may lose a small amount of weight the first day, but should gain steadily after that. Their birth weight should double by 10 to 14 days of age.

The puppies should be started on a mash of puppy food softened with water, or baby rice cereal, at about four weeks of age. They can be weaned off the mother over the next two or three weeks. First vaccinations should be given at six to eight weeks of age.

If you have concerns or questions, please call. Below is a checklist of reasons to call for help:

- The dog has started labor and is not progressing within the time limits listed above.
- The rectal temperature dropped over 24 hours ago and the dog has not started labor.
- The dog appears ill: depressed, feverish, fatigued.
- You have trouble getting the puppies to breathe early on, or to suckle later.
- You're not sure if the dog is done whelping.
- You have any questions or concerns.

If you ever have questions regarding any of the above information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Visit us online at www.WhiteBearAnimalHospital.com.

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