



FOALS AND YOUNGSTERS

Passports

All foals must have a passport by the 31st of December in the year it is born, or by six months of age, whichever is later. If you want to sell your foal or move it without the mare earlier than this, the foal will need a passport prior to this.

Microchipping

All foals now need to be microchipped as part of their passport application. We generally do foal passport IDs and microchips from about 6 weeks of age.

Vaccinations

In most cases we will administer a tetanus antitoxin at the post foaling check which provides the foal with immediate immunity to tetanus, however it is short acting and by 3 months will be wearing off. Foals can be vaccinated for tetanus from 3 months of age and influenza from 5 months of age. It is usual to combine the two vaccines and give both between the 5th and 7th month of age. If the foal has a wound or foot abscess before it has been fully vaccinated for tetanus it is advisable that a second injection of tetanus anti-toxin be administered. Foals can also be vaccinated for EHV1,4 (equine herpes virus) from 5 months of age, if necessary.

Weaning

Foals can be weaned from 5 months to 7 months of age. In special circumstances we may suggest they are weaned earlier, but in most cases weaning takes place about 6 months. It can be a stressful time for all involved but with good organisation it needn't be a hassle.

By 4 months of age most foals will be eating an increasing amount of hay and grass. Their digestive system is changing rapidly as they adapt from a wholly milk diet to the increasing demands of digesting fibre and carbohydrates. By 5-6 months of age their primary nutrition is coming entirely from solid food so are ready for weaning.

The easiest method of weaning is stepwise weaning, however it relies on there being a group of several mares and foals. The foals are weaned in stages, together, by removing mares from the group one by one over a period of a few weeks, eventually leaving just the group of weanlings. This method works well as weanlings remain in the paddock they are familiar with along with their peer group.

Changing environment and being weaned from the mare at the same time can put extra strain on weanlings so it is best to move the mare and leave weaning in the environment he is accustomed to. Where possible try to have the mare and weanling out of ear shot of one another, calling between the two can exacerbate stress and may lead to injury.



If you are not fortunate enough to have a group of mares and foals, introducing a “nanny” horse or pony can work well prior to weaning, this way on weaning day there is a companion to reassure the foal. Try to avoid the situation where the weanling is completely on their own as this is more likely to cause panic.

We generally do not recommend leaving mares with their foals indefinitely. In these cases it is assumed that the youngsters will eventually stop suckling and the mare will dry up, but in reality this seldom happens and as long as the youngster is suckling the mare will continue lactating, acting as a constant drain on the mare.

As you can see there are many different ways to approach weaning, and they largely depend on your facilities, experience and number of youngsters. If you feel you don't have the facilities or know-how, it may be wise to contact a stud which often provide weaning services. Overall, try to make a plan which suits your individual set up and feel free to contact us if you have any concerns.

Feeding

Knowing what to feed rapidly growing youngsters can be confusing and every individual is different. The overall aim is to provide energy, protein and micronutrients required for growth and condition whilst not overconditioning which can exacerbate underlying developmental problems. In the period from birth to 18 months of age most horses will reach 90% of their adult height so there is a tremendous amount of growth in a relatively short period of time.

- As the foal is rapidly growing nutritional demands are high.
- Healthy young foals have big appetites and will drink 20-30% of their body weight in milk per day, so for a 50kg foal that's 10-15L a day!
- Moving on from milk there are many “hardfeeds” available for youngstock but they must be selected carefully for the individual youngster.
- Foal Creep pellets are designed to help youngsters adapt from an easily digestible milk diet to the rigours of digesting roughage and protein. Creep feeds are suitable for the majority of foals and can be gently introduced from as early as a few weeks of age.
- Youngstock need plenty of good quality forage (grass, hay or haylage), the recommended figure for a weaned foal is between 1.5 and 2.5% of bodyweight which for a 200kg youngster is 3 to 5kg a day. In most cases ad-lib forage is a practical feeding option, though keep in mind that a youngster's digestive tract is not as good at digesting roughage as an older horse will be, therefore most will require additional feeding.
- A post weaning “slump” is often reported where weanlings lose condition immediately after weaning. To reduce the likelihood of this happening try to ensure your foal is eating adequate quantities of hard feed prior to weaning. Creep feeding is the most common method. Make sure the mare isn't pinching the foal's creep feed, by using a specially designed creep feeder or tying up the mare at feeding time.
- Yearling growth rates are smaller than those of weanlings, therefore their energy requirements are slightly lower. They also have an increased ability to digest forage and the means to consume larger quantities of forage, so can obtain an increasing amount of energy from forage.
- Thoroughbreds being prepared for sale as yearlings, warmbloods and youngsters with diagnosed developmental orthopaedic problems may require more specialised feeding.



Worming

Foals are born with no immunity to worm infestation and this natural immunity can take years to reach it's maximum. Youngsters are therefore at high risk of developing large worm burdens and consequentially permanent damage. They are also more susceptible to developing high populations of worms resistant to our wormers. Standard chemical worming programmes do not provide adequate coverage for foals or young stock as they assume a certain level of natural immunity.

Where possible youngsters should be turned out on "clean" pasture, which has not been grazed by other young stock for at least 18 months.

Higher risk foals should be wormed once a month from 1 month of age. (Use the weight tape or consult the vet about the approximate weight of the foal in order to give the foal the correct dosage).

At 6mths of age the wormer used should also be effective against tapeworm. From 6 months of age the foal can be slotted into your standard/yearling worming programme.

With such widespread resistance to the Benzimidazoles eg Panacur there is probably little value in using this unless you can prove good sensitivity to it.

Therefore the two sub-classes of wormers most commonly used in foals are the ivermectin and pyrantel groups see below for trade names. Always read the data sheet for safety warnings, contra-indications and licensed treatments prior to treating.

Wormer trade name	Active ingredient	Suitable for foals from what age	Suitable for lactating mares?*	Suitable for pregnant mares?
Eraquell Paste, Noromectin, Eqvalan, Maximec, Vectin, Furexel	Ivermectin	From 6 weeks of age	Yes	Yes
Strongid P, Pyratape P, Embotape	Pyrantel	From 4 weeks of age	Yes	Yes
Equest	Moxidectin	From 5 months of age	Yes	Yes
Equest Pramox	Moxidectin & Praziquantal	From 7 months of age	No	No

*We recommend that mares should not be wormed in the first two weeks after foaling.



While selective treatment after worm egg counts is currently not generally recommended for a yearling or foals, faecal egg count reduction tests (FECRT) are useful in this age group to help identify which wormers are likely to be effective, particularly against *Parascaris equorum*. Premises with numerous foals would be well advised to be carrying out FECRT on a number of the foals at least once a year to check the effectiveness of the wormers being used and alter the program accordingly. This involves taking a worm egg count immediately prior to and then 2 weeks following worming and comparing the results. For more information on FECRT please read our brochure on worm egg counts or look at the website www.equitait.com.

One regime would be to treat foals using a pyrantel based product at 1 month of age then monthly until an ivermectin based product at 5 months of age and a double dose of a pyrantel based product at 6 months of age before slotting them into an adult based program, whilst also utilising FECRT to check for resistance at least once a year.

Dentistry

If any dental abnormalities were picked up on our post foaling examination we may recommend that we start corrective dental work immediately. If all is well as a foal in most cases we recommend a first dental examination at around 2 years old. This allows us to check on the eruption of adult teeth replacing the baby teeth, known as “caps” and identify any hereditary abnormalities with the teeth which may require extra care to manage. Between 2½ and 4½ years of age your youngster will lose 24 caps! These caps can on occasion be retained which in some cases leads to painful inflammation and infection. Given that we often start biting and breaking work around 3 years old it is vital to make sure there are no painful sources in the mouth before you get started. At this stage we would also be checking for the presence of wolf teeth which may lead on to a discussion as to the possibility of their removal. It also is a good opportunity to get your youngster comfortable with a procedure which they will likely undergo annually for most of their lives.

Farriery

It is important that a foal’s first experience with the farrier is as positive as possible. Prepare for this by practising picking up your foal’s feet every day and it will soon become accustomed to it, making everyone’s life much easier. Correct trimming of the foal’s hooves is particularly important as even distribution of weight will help support the correct growth of your foal’s rapidly growing limbs.

Usually the first visit from the farrier would be at 1 month of age, and they should be checked by the farrier monthly thereafter until they are weaned. Often there will be little to trim but the foal will be growing rapidly and the farrier may detect a problem associated with this rapid growth which with early correction need not be an ongoing issue. Once weaned growth will slow down slightly and weanlings should be seen by a farrier every 6- 8 weeks.

Foals can be born with limb abnormalities that need combined veterinary and farriery intervention. Some abnormalities at birth will correct themselves within the first few weeks of life but we recommend you check any concerns regarding limbs with us as soon as you spot them.