

What to expect and look out for in your whelping bitch or queen

Stages of Parturition:

There are three stages of labour in both bitches and queens and I will outline the normal events you, the owner, should be looking out for in your dog or cat.

Stage 1 is characterised by nesting behaviour and restlessness. Some animals also become anorexic and shiver during this phase. In the dog, panting is usually seen. It is now that the animal's cervix will begin to expand in preparation for the impending birth. The uterine contractions begin to increase in frequency and strength, however, you are very unlikely to see these. Stage 1 will usually last from 6-12 hours, but may be up to a full 24 hours in some bitches.



It is in **Stage 2** that we start to see obvious abdominal contractions. This is followed by passage of the amniotic fluid and delivery of the puppy or kitten. The amniotic fluid or 'bag' sometimes is seen protruding from the vulva for several minutes, even if the animal decides to get up and wander about. Your best bet if this happens is to try and return to the nesting area, dim the lights and minimise distractions. There may be intermittent, active straining for several hours before the delivery of the first neonate, and Stage 2 is usually achieved within 3-6 hours. I have seen it last up to 12 hours in bitches and 24 hours in queens, both resulting in healthy litters. There is usually an interval of less than 1 hour between births IF the animal is continuing to contract rather than having a rest. Rarely, 12-24 hours pass between the births of healthy kittens but this is NOT normal in the dog.

Stage 3 is passage of the placenta, which normally occurs 5-15 minutes after each birth. Mom will remove the membranes from and clean the neonate; she will then sever the umbilicus and eat the placenta. She should not be discouraged in doing so. If she doesn't remove the foetal membranes from the newborn's face after birth, you should. However, cleaning the puppy or kitten is important maternal behaviour required for bonding so you should encourage her to do it. All placentas would be expected to pass within 4-6 hours.

Indications to give us a call:

- Any sign of illness in full-term female.
- More than 24 hours of anorexia in full-term queen.
- Any abnormal vulvar discharge (note: some times amniotic sac contents can be brown foetal defecation)
- Failure to progress from Stage 1 to Stage 2 after 12 hours.
- Partially delivered foetus for more than 15 minutes.
- More than 3 hours of Stage 2 labour before the first birth.
- More than 1 hour of ACTIVE labour between births.
- Constant, unrelenting straining for more than 20-30 minutes.
- Labour appears to have stopped before birth of entire litter.