

Down on the Farm



The Neonatal Orphan

by LEIGH ANN HOWARD

Probably the most abrupt and dramatic death of a mare occurs when the main uterine artery is ruptured at foaling. When this happens, the mare rarely even gets up. There is no preventative care for this situation, there is no time to react and there is nothing a person can do to help the mare.

Another condition, known as a "slow leak", is somewhat similar, in that a smaller artery that supplies the uterus develops a slight tear or leak. This is not the same as the above mentioned ruptured artery and if you are lucky you won't lose the mare. If, after foaling, you notice the mare looking depressed, very quiet or disoriented and the membranes in her mouth, above her teeth, are pale or even white, you need to keep her very quiet and call your veterinarian.

The death of a mare is difficult at any time but the death of a mare with a newborn foal is especially difficult. There is no time to mourn the loss with that newborn badly in need of care.

So what do you do if you are caught in this situation?

The very first thing you need to do is get some colostrum in to the baby. If he has not yet stood he will probably readily take whatever you give him in a bottle

with a nipple. Because he needs the antibodies provided by the colostrum, it is paramount that he receives this substance first.

As unappealing as it sounds, try to get as much colostrum as you can from the newborn's mother. The mother's own colostrum is the best as it was produced to protect the baby from the infections to which the mare has been exposed.

If you have some frozen colostrum, saved from other mares, that can be very handy. But most likely you will not have any readily available. Remember, your window of opportunity, for getting protection into the baby by the oral route is only eight to twelve hours.

There is a good possibility that your veterinarian has some sort of oral colostrum. My veterinarian carries a product called Seramune Oral. It is kept refrigerated and warmed only when it is to be used.

There is another product being used by several of the Riverside and San Diego county breeders called Equine Immunogam. It is a dried powder that has to be reconstituted with distilled water just before use. It has a shelf life, in the dry form, of two years but does need to be kept in the refrigerator.

There are certainly other products out there that will aid in building the immune system of your foal. Check with your veterinarian or with a veterinarian on a large breeding farm in your area.

Once you get the colostrum or colostrum supplement into the baby you are going to need to supply him with some sort of mare milk replacement.

There are many products on the market that work very nicely. If you are caught in the middle of the night and have nothing special on hand, you could mix up the formula recommended in Dr. Madigan's "Manual of Equine Neonatal Medicine".



Cow's Milk Formula:

- 1 liter of 2% milk
- 20 gm or 40 ml of dextrose (Karo Syrup)

OR

- 1 can evaporated cow's milk (canned milk)
- 2 cans water
- 50 ml of 50% dextrose (Karo Syrup)

I like the formula put out by Ross laboratories called Nutri-Foal. This comes in powdered form in three-pound cans and can be kept on the shelf for some time unopened. This product is quite expensive and has to be purchased from a veterinarian.

Another excellent product is Land 'O Lakes "Mare's Match". This is also in powdered form and mixes readily with water. Many large breeding farms now use this product, stating that it seems to be the most palatable and less likely to cause intestinal upsets.

Foal Lac, made by Carnation, has been the old standby for many years and comes in both powdered form and a small pellet. The pellet becomes very handy when the foal has reached the point of



not needing a bottle every few hours.

Another supplement that a person might consider adding to the milk when the baby is a week old is put out by Buckeye Laboratories in Ohio. Called Foal-Aid, it is a Vitamin and Trace Mineral Drench for suckling foals.

The packet says it is "to be given to foals from one week to three months of age. This supplies the necessary vitamins and trace minerals to aid in proper growth when foals are not consuming enough Buckeye Foal Starter Feed or when physitis, contracted tendons and other indications of Developmental Orthopedic Disease are apparent."

All the milk replacement products have complete mixing directions included on their packaging that should be followed closely.

The supplies you need to bottle feed the baby include a nipple and a bottle. An electric blender makes mixing the powder and water easier.

We have always used a "Lamb's" nipple, readily purchased at most feed stores. I have just read of the "Nuk" nipple in a Cindy Hale article titled "Little Orphan Annie" in the most recent *Horse Illustrated* magazine. This is a nipple, available in any drug store, made for human babies with a flat side that more closely resembles a mare's teat. Either one of these nipples works well. You might want to cut a bit larger "X" across the end of the nipple as the baby gets the hang of sucking. But don't make the opening too big or the baby will get too much milk at once. This could cause milk to "go down the

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wrong way” and the baby could end up with aspiration pneumonia.

Be sure to feed the baby at regular intervals for a couple of weeks. Those tiny stomachs need to be kept working so that foal ulcers don't occur.

Also be sure to test the orphan's IgG level about twenty four hours after their birth to be sure they received

enough protection from the colostrum or supplement that you used. If their levels are low your veterinarian will need to see that they receive plasma.

Goats are often the answer if you have a herd or know a friend with a herd. You can build a raised platform where the goat can stand and eat her grain while the baby reaches up and nurses. This can be very successful and eliminates the need to mix up milk.

It would be lovely to get a nurse mare to adopt the baby as her own. That is the best answer

but few of us are that lucky, because the timing is so critical. Not only is a nurse mare the best answer as far as feeding goes, she is also the best answer for the mental health of the baby.

The next best answer is to find a kind mare that will adopt the baby. Then the baby will be taught horsey lessons and be able to run in a herd with other mares and babies.

Caring for an orphan is expensive, both monetarily and physically. And certainly not something anyone should jump into without preparation.