

Queening/Whelping

Keeping your pet safe during pregnancy and birthing



The difference between cats and dogs

Although cats and dogs are different in many ways, their needs during pregnancy and the birthing process are very similar. Here are some of the things that you will need to know to ensure the pregnancy and birth goes as smoothly as possible. Once a cat or dog is bred, she will remain pregnant for approximately two months. Just like in people, the exact number of days is variable, but there are signs you can watch for to let you know that the new family members are on their way.

It is very important to consult your veterinarian about the nutritional needs of your pet during pregnancy and after giving birth. Pregnant pets require additional nutrients to prevent depletion of the body's resources as the fetus develops. It is imperative to provide this additional nutritional support or serious, life-threatening complications can occur. Improper nutrition during this time can significantly affect the survivability of the newborns as well as the overall health of the mother.

What are the signs of impending birth?

You may notice your pet choosing what she feels is just the right spot to give birth. This will usually be in a quiet place, away from noise and activity. Dogs, especially, may drag toys, pillows or blankets to their nests. Cats may seek privacy in places like closets or laundry baskets. Trying to move your pet from their chosen place unnecessarily can cause a lot of stress and anxiety. Within 24 hours preceding delivery (called whelping in dogs and queening in cats) your pet will likely lose her appetite and stop eating altogether as labor approaches. However, despite a lost appetite, the pet will be alert and responsive. It is not normal for a pet to be depressed or become unresponsive so you should contact your Banfield veterinarian immediately if you detect these signs.

What are the first signs of labor?

The first signs of labor are restlessness and possibly panting and pacing. At this point, the pet's body temperature will usually decrease mildly. As labor progresses to major contractions, your pet will lay on her side and you will be able to see her abdominal muscles contracting. Kittens and puppies can be born head or tail first. Once you can see the new puppy or kitten, it should be expelled from the birth canal quickly by the female. In most cases, the mother won't need your help, but do monitor the birth if you can do so without causing stress to the mother. The female should remove the birth sac and stimulate the puppy or kitten to breathe by licking it. If for some reason she doesn't do this within a few minutes of birth, you may need to assist by removing the sac from the baby's face and gently rubbing the baby with a dry soft cloth to stimulate breathing. When the baby cries and starts moving around, return it to the mother immediately. Many dogs and cats will eat the placenta or birth sac. This is okay and is a normal, instinctual behavior.



For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

Nursing

Nursing shortly after birth is very important because the first milk contains important antibodies which protect newborns. If the litter is very large or one of the newborns is small or weak, you may need to intervene to ensure the puppy or kitten gets a turn to nurse. Close contact with the mother and littermates for warmth is very important as cold puppies and kittens become too weak to nurse and can die quickly as a result.

When should you contact your Banfield team during this process?

Contact your hospital team if the female shows purposeful labor for greater than 30 minutes in dogs and 60 minutes in cats without birth, if a kitten or puppy becomes stuck in the birth canal or if longer than four hours elapses between the births of

puppies. Cats can actually stop their labor if they are disturbed so making sure the place she has picked out is quiet and calm is essential. Also, contact us in the event that any of the puppies or kittens are born dead, if any sufficient amount of bleeding or abnormal material appears from the birth canal, the pet cries and licks or bites at the vulvar area during whelping, or if anything else about your pet's delivery concerns you. Although most births go well, pets can get into trouble and may need urgent or emergency care. This is particularly true in certain dog breeds. However, most births proceed normally and most females have good mothering instincts. So, it's best not to interfere unless a real need for your help arises. It is important that the area around the female be calm and quiet with as little commotion as possible. Remember, since queening and whelping are complicated processes, there's always a chance for problems to develop. By keeping in contact with your Banfield veterinarian during your pet's pregnancy, you'll help to ensure the safest possible delivery and you'll start your new puppies or kittens off on the right paw toward a long, happy, healthy life.



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