



Hand-raising an orphaned foal requires a commitment to providing adequate nutrition, housing, and care to give the foal the best chance to grow into a healthy, productive adult. This information is designed to help provide a better understanding of generally accepted management guidelines and how each recommendation benefits the foal. It is not intended to provide treatment recommendations - there is no substitute for sound advice from your veterinarian.

DIP THE NAVEL CORD IMMEDIATELY AFTER BIRTH TO HELP PREVENT NAVEL INFECTION

Immediately after birth, the navel cord should be dipped in iodine or other appropriate disinfectant solution to help prevent bacterial infection. A long navel cord should be trimmed to 3 or 4 inches in length before dipping. A bleeding cord should be dipped, and then tied with surgical suture material. Dipping the navel cord also promotes rapid drying and the eventual breaking away of the cord from the navel.

FEED COLOSTRUM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER BIRTH

Colostrum, or first milk, contains antibodies which are not passed to the foal in utero. Colostrum must be fed promptly (within 2 hours if possible, and no later than 4 hours after birth) because the foal rapidly loses the ability to absorb these critical proteins. Colostrum should be bottle-fed in small amounts (200 to 500 mL per feeding, depending on the size of the foal) hourly for the first 24 hours of life, to help insure adequate consumption. The mare's colostrum is always the best choice if it is available, clean and disease free. Collect colostrum into a clean container and feed immediately. Refrigerate or freeze unused colostrum promptly to slow bacterial growth. Feed colostrum for the first 24 to 48 hours of life, and then transition gradually to milk replacer if needed.

USE A COLOSTRUM SUPPLEMENT IF NO MATERNAL COLOSTRUM IS AVAILABLE

Colostrum that is contaminated with blood, manure or chunky material should be discarded and not fed. Substitute another mare's colostrum or fresh cow or goat colostrum, or use a colostrum supplement according to label directions for foals if no fresh or frozen colostrum is available. Calf colostrum supplements and replacers are also good choices, as most supplement products labeled for foals contain Bovine (cow) antibodies anyways. If you are not able to feed colostrum within the first 24 hours of life (when the foal can absorb them into its bloodstream as intact proteins), consider having your veterinarian administer a serum immunoglobulin product by IV to provide critical protective antibodies to your foal.

MILK REPLACER – FREQUENT SMALL MEALS ARE BEST

Milk is the primary source of nutrition for the pre-weaned foal for several weeks. Hand raised foals can be fed milk by bottle or in a pail. Under natural conditions, foals nurse very small amounts of milk at frequent intervals. Artificial feeding should mimic the natural feeding schedule as closely as possible, but this can be very labor intensive for the feeder. Bottle feed for the first few days to make sure the foal is nursing well and receiving enough milk, and then begin training the foal to drink milk from a pail. To minimize the chance of digestive problems, foals should be fed at least 12 times daily when feeding by bottle, then you can begin feeding milk in a pail 4 times daily. Following the milk replacer label directions carefully, divide the total recommended amount of liquid milk daily by the number of feedings, adjusting as needed for body weight and appetite. When offering milk replacer free choice in a pail, it is important to feed the milk replacer cool to cold to help prevent over-consumption and colic. Make sure the pail is large enough that the foal can easily get its muzzle to the bottom of the pail (preferably without covering its eyes), and secure the pail at chest height in a sheltered area away from other animals. When making changes in milk replacer formulas or amounts fed, do so gradually over several days time to minimize digestive upset.

WHAT IF MY FOAL DEVELOPS SCOURS (DIARRHEA)?

If your foal develops scours (diarrhea), provide supplemental electrolytes mixed with water and fed separately from milk. The extra fluids are important to help prevent dehydration and restore fluid and electrolyte balance. Electrolytes do not contain nearly enough nutrients to sustain normal body maintenance, much less allow for a strong immune response, so do not discontinue regular milk replacer feedings. It best not to use gel or paste electrolyte products, or to top-dress electrolytes powder on the foal's creep feed, because these methods depend on the foal drinking extra water, and this might not occur in a nursing foal. Providing electrolytes in liquid solution in a bottle or pail will give you the ability to monitor the foal's supplemental fluid intake.



HOUSING CONSIDERATIONS

Provide a clean, well-bedded enclosure with safe fencing and a shelter that is draft free. If possible, house the foal with a gentle mare with a foal or a smaller companion such as a pony, donkey or goat. Monitor the foal's pen mates carefully for signs of aggression.

OFFER FREE CHOICE DRY FEED AND WATER EARLY

Foals should be offered a high-quality creep feed with at least 16-18% crude protein, fine-stemmed hay and fresh water in the first week. If you are housing the foal with other horses, make the feed available in a separate creep area that only the foal has access to. Sprinkle dry milk replacer powder onto the creep feed to help get the foal interested, if needed. If you are top-dressing with milk replacer powder, dump and scrub the pail at least daily, or as often as needed to prevent spoilage.

WEAN FROM MILK REPLACER WHEN THE FOAL IS EATING ENOUGH SOLID FEED

A healthy foal that is consuming hay, grain and fresh water daily, and is growing well, can usually be weaned from milk replacer at about 12 to 16 weeks of age. The most important consideration is dry feed intake - the foal must receive enough nutrition to continue to grow well without the milk. Gradually decrease the number of milk feedings over several days time. Avoid weaning at or near the same time as other stressful activities, such as transport or vaccination.

HAVE YOUR VETERINARIAN EXAMINE THE FOAL REGULARLY

Your veterinarian should examine the foal in the first day or two of life, then at regular intervals prior to weaning to make sure the foal is healthy and growing well.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Your veterinarian and local university extension agent are often excellent resources for foal management information, as well as many online sources. Please visit the Learning and Resource Center at www.savacaf.com for some helpful online links.