



WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

Caring for Newborn Foals: Common Problems

Welcoming a new foal is an exciting time, but the first few days and weeks of life are also when problems can arise quickly. Knowing what to look out for can make all the difference in ensuring your foal gets the best possible start. This newsletter highlights some of the most common issues seen in newborns.

Failure of Passive Transfer (FPT)

Foals are born without a fully developed immune system. They rely on antibodies from their mother's first milk, known as colostrum, to protect them from infection. If a foal doesn't receive enough good-quality colostrum within the first 12–24 hours, they are at high risk of illness.

Signs to watch for:

- Foal seems weak or slow to stand
- Poor suckling
- Increased susceptibility to infections, swollen joints or umbilicus

What to do:

Ensure the foal stands and nurses within 2 hours of birth. We recommend a simple blood test at 18–24 hours to check antibody levels and confirm their immune status.

Neonatal Septicaemia (Blood Infection)

This is one of the most serious conditions affecting foals and often linked to failure of passive transfer.

Signs to watch for:

- Lethargy or weakness
- Swollen joints
- Fever (or sometimes low temperature)
- Not nursing properly

What to do:

Septicaemia can progress rapidly and is life-threatening if not treated early, so it should be treated as a veterinary emergency.



Dummy Foal Syndrome (Neonatal Maladjustment Syndrome)

Some foals appear normal at birth but develop abnormal behaviour within a few hours.

Signs to watch for:

- Wandering aimlessly
- Not recognising the mare
- Difficulty nursing or standing
- Appearing “sleepy” or disoriented

What to do:

With prompt veterinary care, many foals recover fully, so please call us if you have concerns about your foal's behaviour.



Meconium Impaction

Meconium is the first manure a foal should pass within a few hours of birth. If it isn't passed, it can cause painful constipation.

Signs to watch for:

- Straining or tail swishing
- Rolling or signs of colic
- Not passing manure

What to do:

Mild cases can respond to an enema which we can provide, however persistent signs require veterinary investigation.



Diarrhoea in Foals

Not all diarrhoea is serious - “foal heat diarrhoea” around 7–10 days old is common and usually mild.

However if your foal:

- Becomes dull
- Stops nursing
- Shows signs of dehydration (sunken eyes, dry gums, wrinkled skin)
- Or has a fever

Please call us immediately.

In Summary:

The first 24–48 hours of a foal's life are critical. Careful observation, a clean foaling environment, and early veterinary involvement are key to preventing and managing problems. If you're ever unsure, don't wait, we are here to help!



