



## Care of the Newborn Foal-Navel Ill Prevention

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After many months of hard (and expensive) work in the breeding shed, and countless hours on foal watch, you are greeted with the wonderful sounds of a mare gently nickering at her new foal. If you are like most of our clients, you didn't get to witness the birth because the mare held out until she heard the back door close and the porch light turn off-signaling she has some time to herself. Try not to be too upset with yourself for missing the birth and try to forgive the mare for cheating you out of being a part of the event after many sleepless nights. Chances are, if the mare was fine 2 or 3 hours prior, and now has a new foal looking for its first meal, things went just fine.

A first priority in keeping our new foal from getting sick is navel care. During fetal development, the umbilical cord is the foal's lifeline. Within the umbilical cord are two umbilical arteries, one umbilical vein, and the urachus-the extension of the urinary bladder which allows the fetus to void urine. Shortly after birth, the umbilical cord breaks. The umbilical stump remains, thus leaving a potential access point for environmental pathogens to gain access to our newborn foal. Navel ill, or omphalophlebitis, is the term given to an infection of any or all of the structures of the umbilical stump. Unfortunately, many umbilical infections do not self contain to the umbilical area. Because the umbilicus is made of a vein and two arteries, navel infections can travel up the stump and enter the bloodstream leading to septicemia, potential growth plate and joint infections and possibly death.

So what can we do to protect our new foal from such a horrible disease? The answer is simple-Keep things clean! The first thing we recommend to our clients is dipping the umbilicus with a dilute Nolvasan (generically known as 2% Chlorhexidine) solution as soon as possible after birth and then 3 times daily for the first 2-3 days of the foal's life. A good dilution is 1 part Nolvasan in 4 parts water. This makes a fantastic disinfectant which is not irritating to the delicate umbilical tissues. Never dip the umbilicus in strong iodine! Current research shows that iodine can actually kill some of the tissues of the umbilicus, leading to delayed umbilical healing which can increase the risk of umbilical infection.

The second thing I recommend is cleaning the stall. Replacing wet bedding with fresh, dry bedding will greatly reduce the likelihood of the foal being exposed to environmental bacteria when it lies down.

Finally, contact your veterinarian. It may sound like a shameless plug for business, but the truth is, the vast majority of 3 day old foals with navel ill were foals who did not absorb adequate antibodies from their dam's colostrum (failure or passive transfer) during the first 24 hours of life. A simple stall-side blood test when the foal is 12-24 hours old can tell your veterinarian if the foal's immune system is weak, thus at increased risk for future infections. Prompt preventative action can then be taken which will strengthen the foal's immune system and help reduce the risk of neonatal illness.

A new healthy foal can make all of the work done the previous breeding season worth while. A sick foal, on the other hand, can ruin your year. Getting off on the right foot with umbilical care and a simple antibody screening test will help prevent serious setbacks in your foal's healthy development. If you have questions about your new foal or a concern regarding the health and well-being of any of your horses, do not hesitate to call our clinic. A veterinarian will be glad to assist you with all of your equine medicine, lameness, surgery or reproductive needs.