

## Whelping in the Bitch: What you should Know

### Normal Delivery

Before your bitch whelps (has puppies), you should know a bit about what to expect.

Labor in the bitch has 3 stages, which are as follows:

**Stage I:** The bitch often nests or digs frantically during this stage. She will look for a place to have her puppies. She may look at or bite at her sides. During this stage, uterine contractions and cervical dilation are occurring, but you will not see these in your bitch. If you choose to monitor your dog with a uterine monitoring system, then you will be able to detect the uterine contractions. Monitoring your bitch's uterine contractions is recommended and will need to be pre-arranged. Contact our clinic if you would like to arrange for such monitoring.

**Stage II:** The bitch will have more frequent uterine contractions and will have abdominal contractions, which you will be able to see. During Stage II, the bitch will deliver her puppies.

**Stage III:** The bitch delivers the placenta during this stage.

Note that because a bitch most often has multiple puppies, Stage II and Stage III alternate during delivery.

### What You Should Do At Home

A week before your bitch's anticipated delivery date, you should monitor her rectal temperature three times a day to determine what your bitch's normal range of temperatures is. You should take the temperatures at rest, not after exercise or excitement. A drop in body temperature is defined as a single temperature that is 0.5 degrees Celsius or 1 degree Fahrenheit or more lower than her lowest previous rectal temperature measurement. Note that not all bitches exhibit a drop in body temperature. Delivery typically starts 12-24 hours after the temperature drops.

Monitor your bitch during her delivery.

Please note that your bitch may bite and sever her puppies' umbilical cords and eat the placenta; this is normal behavior. However, eating the placenta can upset a bitch's gastrointestinal system and possibly cause vomiting or diarrhea, so it should be discouraged.

After your bitch has had her puppies, you should be sure that she and her puppies are monitored at all times by an awake adult for a minimum of 72 hours after having her puppies. Ideally, she and the puppies should be monitored 24/7 every 2-3 hours for 3 weeks after delivery.



The puppies need to receive colostrum (the mother's first milk which contains antibodies which comprise the puppies' early immune system) within the first few hours after birth. You can rub the puppies with placenta-stained towels to help stimulate the bitch to mother her puppies. If you have trouble getting the puppies to nurse, contact us.

### **When You Should Seek Veterinary Attention**

- If your bitch has not started labor more than 72 days from the breeding date or more than 65 days after ovulation, if you know the date of ovulation.
- If your bitch is not showing signs of Stage I labor within 24 hours of the temperature drop.
- If your bitch doesn't progress from Stage I to Stage II after 6-8 hours of Stage I.
- If your bitch actively strains to deliver a puppy for 20-30 minutes without delivering one.
- If your bitch has intermittent or weak straining with no puppy delivered within an hour.
- If you notice lochia (green discharge from the placenta) and no puppy follows it within 30 minutes.
- If there are 2 hours between puppies with no straining.
- If you think there is something wrong. If you have bred your bitch before, you will know the subtleties of her whelping as you know her more intimately than we do. If you suspect something is wrong, you should call us.
- If a puppy or puppies have not nursed within 2 to 3 hours of birth.

