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The Foal is the Goal

By Dr. Whitney Ostrem

When deciding to breed your mare remember it is an endeavor. It is one where the owner, particularly of the mare, will usually need to invest time and money. For this reason, a horse owner needs to consider several factors, including what you need to do to get your mare ready for breeding this year.

1. **Parasite Control;** Deworming is always important, particularly before and during pregnancy. Worms can rob your mare of vital nutrients needed in the development of your foal. By preventing parasite infestation you can potentially avoid colic, poor doing, compromised fetal growth, and decrease your foal's exposure to worms.

2. **Disease Prevention;** Mares should be fully vaccinated pre-breeding in order to ward off any infections that may cause your mare to lose her pregnancy. Core vaccines include: Influenza, Rhinopneumonitis (EHV-1&4), Sleeping Sickness (WEE, EEE), Tetanus, Rabies and West Nile Virus. If you are unsure of the mare's vaccination history or there are other extenuating circumstances, please call and we will create a personal vaccination program that will best protect your mare and future foal.

3. **Breeding Soundness Exam (BSE);** A BSE should be performed to assess the mare's reproductive potential. This important examination has several components. Mares undergo a physical examination, including an assessment of the conformation of the mare's perineum (the rectal and vulvar area). Transrectal palpation and ultrasound of the reproductive tract are also performed to assess where the mare is in the estrous cycle and to evaluate any pathology, such as abnormalities of the ovaries, uterus, cervix, vagina, or bladder. A BSE may also include sample submissions for laboratory analysis. Uterine culture and cytology are used to screen for infection or inflammation, and a uterine endometrial biopsy can provide information regarding the potential of the uterus to carry a foal to term. Schedule your BSE with your veterinarian early in the season, as your mare may need treatment for any diagnosed condition.

4. **Dental;** Good dental care should also be a part of your breeding program, either pre-breeding or post-foaling. With appropriate dental care your mare will gain proper nutrition from feed, reduce her potential for colic and help her maintain her weight.

5. **Nutrition;** Your mare can be maintained on her normal diet throughout her pregnancy, if you are providing nutritious forage. A mare being fed a complete balanced diet seldom needs supplementation with vitamins and minerals. Extreme weather conditions may cause your mare's nutritional needs to alter. If your mare has a body score greater than 6/9 use caution and do not over feed. Please consult with your veterinarian if you are unsure of what diet is appropriate for your mare.