

What to Expect When Your Dog's in Labor

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(Editor's Note, Dr. Peter Kintzer: Given the large number of homeless dogs available for adoption that would be wonderful pets and companions, very careful thought and serious deliberation should be undertaken before electing to breed your dog. Please consider adoption and [click here for more information](#)>)

[In the first part](#) — of this two part series — we talked about supporting your dog during her pregnancy including trying to have a clear idea of her due date and how many puppies are on the way. Now we will talk about helping her through the big event itself.

How do you know your dog is in labor?

As we discussed in part one, towards the end of your dog's pregnancy you should be taking her rectal temperature every day, and waiting for the sudden drop below 99-100 degrees Fahrenheit that signals that labor is close.

When labor begins, most dogs start to become restless, want to be alone and start nesting. They also tend to stop eating and may even vomit. (Of course some dogs continue eating and remain sociable.) According to [UCDavis](#), uterine contractions start and occur at progressively more frequent intervals though they still may be hard for you to appreciate. Any vaginal discharge that you see should still look like clear mucus.

In the second stage of labor the dog's contractions are more visible and stronger as she uses her abdominal muscles to expel puppies. She may get into a squatting position to accomplish this, but she also may just remain lying down. It is also perfectly normal for almost half of all puppies to be born back end first (or breech delivery). That is not a concern.

A normal delivery should occur within 10 to 60 minutes of strong, stage two, labor contractions.

Third stage labor involves the expulsion of the placenta. Be aware and count to be sure your dog delivers the same number of placentas as she does puppies. She does NOT, however, need to (nor is there any benefit to) eating the placentas. Feel free to take them away to dispose of them.

Note: Most dogs instinctively know to lick the puppy to remove the membranes, to stimulate breathing and to care for their newborns, but not all of them will. Puppy care is beyond the scope of this posting but by all means familiarize yourself with the procedures in case you do have to step in and care for the little ones.

How do you know if there is a problem that requires you or your veterinarian's intervention?

Dystocia (or difficulty giving birth) can be a serious problem for both mother and pups. Once you know how a normal birth progresses, any deviation from that norm is worthy of a phone call to your veterinarian or an emergency clinic depending on the time of day. It's far better to contact your veterinarian and to be told that everything is okay than it is to not call and take the chance. It's important, however, that you call someone first because it's not in your dog's best interest to disturb her or to disrupt her delivery by rushing her off to the hospital unnecessarily.

Discuss this all ahead of time with your veterinarian

so you know when/why he or she feels you should make contact. In general, though, consider calling if (as stated by [UCDavis](#)):

- Your dog goes beyond her proposed due date
- You do not see evidence that Stage 1 labor has started 24-36 hours after the drop in rectal temperature mentioned above
- Stage 1 labor has not progressed to Stage 2 labor after 24 hours
- The first puppy has not been delivered after 1 hour of active labor
- It has been more than two hours without another puppy arriving. (It is normal for dogs to occasionally take a break from labor between pups, but that resting period tends to last just an hour or two.)
- Vaginal discharge turns green or involves large amounts of blood between deliveries.

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- Your dog is in apparent distress or pain.
- Puppies are stillborn or are alive but seem weak or not normal.
- You know that there are more puppies on the way but your dog appears to be exhausted and labor seems to have stopped. (We talked about taking Xrays late in pregnancy to count the pups. In the midst of labor that information can be extremely valuable.)

Hopefully your dog's labor will be normal and uneventful and in the end mother and pups will all be fine, but the key is to be as prepared as possible. Know what to expect. And know who to call.

[<< Read Part One](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.