

## Whelping (Canine)

### Whelping Box

In the last few weeks of pregnancy the bitch should be encouraged to accept a nest in a suitable place – ideally a warm and clean room isolated from the rest of the household and free from draughts into which a whelping box may be placed.

The whelping box should be large enough to allow the dam to stretch and have sufficient room for a large litter. The sides of the box should be high enough to prevent the pups from escaping up to about 4 weeks of age. The provision of a ledge around the box sides may be useful to prevent the dam from crushing her pups. Warm soft bedding should be provided.

### First signs of birth

It is a good idea to be recording the rectal temperature of the bitch during the last few days before the birth. Normal rectal temperature varies between 38.5°C and 39.5°C. Within 24 hours before the onset of labour a temperature drop of 1 to 2 degrees will occur.

The bitch may be restless, nervous or seek seclusion. She may refuse food. This stage may last from 6 to 24 hours. This is a good time to try and ensure that she is taken out to toilet.

### Whelping/Birth

Contractions and pushing efforts begin. Usually a small greenish sac of fluid first protrudes from the vulva. The puppy and its attached placenta follow. She will have a resting stage which follows each delivery. After each pup is delivered, the bitch will normally lick the pup, cleaning off the membranes and stimulating respiration. She will bite through the umbilical cord and eat the placenta.

There will be a gap between the births of each pup ranging from minutes to sometimes an hour.

### Whelping Complications

1. **Straining/Pushing with no result** – If your bitch has been pushing for more than 2 hours and there is no sign of any pup or a pup is possibly stuck **phone the clinic**.
2. **Bitch not cleaning pups after the birth** – The pup will normal be born in its sac and the bitch will clean it away from its face and stimulate it to breath by cleaning. If she is not get a soft towel and break the sac around its face clear the airway then encourage the bitch to do the rest.
3. **Bitch does not want to know the puppies** – Sometimes it can all be a bit overwhelming for the bitch especially if it is her first litter, she may need you to sit with her quietly and encourage the pups to feed. The suckling of the puppies releases hormones to help with her milk letdown and the bonding of her with the pups.
4. **Bitch is aggressive towards the owners** – Some bitches even with the best personalities can become aggressive or simply very protective of their new puppies – just give her some space and she will normally settle.

## Post Natal Care

The best thing you can do is give your bitch some time and space to bond with her puppies as they are born and after – too much involvement or interruptions can cause many problems. Limit the number of checks and visitors.

Have plenty of water and quality food available to her as she may not have eaten for 24 hours prior to whelping. She will decide when she is ready to go out to the toilet don't force the issue.

## Post Natal Complications

1. **Hypocalcaemia (Milk Fever)\*\*** – This is an emergency situation. It is mainly seen during late pregnancy and early weeks of lactation when there are extremely low levels of calcium. Signs will be panting, shivering/shaking, salivation, restlessness which, if untreated, can lead to death.  
**\*\*Phone clinic immediately.**
2. **Bitch unable to feed the pups** – Sometimes the bitch does not have enough nipples to feed all her pups or not enough milk. We have bottles and formula available at the clinic as you may need to help her out by topping up some of the pups with a bottle.
3. **Unsettled pups** – The only reason you will have crying unsettled pups is either they are hungry or cold. Puppies at a young age cannot regulate their body temperature.
4. **Fading puppies** – Pups are lethargic and don't feed well usually in the first 2 weeks. If you notice any puppies showing these signs please phone the clinic.

It is normal to see a discharge from the vulva after whelping which can persist for up to 6 weeks. As long as your bitch is bright and happy, eating normally then there is no need to worry.

## Puppy Care

Your bitch will be the sole feeder of the puppies until around 4 weeks of age when you will need to start to provide an appropriate complete and balanced weaning formula for you puppies

Worm the puppies with a puppy worming suspension every 2 weeks until 12 weeks of age then every 3 months for the rest of their lives.

Puppies need their 1<sup>st</sup> vaccination at the age of 6 weeks. They are then able to be re-homed at 8 weeks of age.