

## Understanding Dog Breeding and Pregnancy

The decision to breed a dog should not be taken lightly. While it may be nice to have a puppy from a favorite pet, the hundreds of thousands of homeless dogs that wind up in shelters every year should be considered. Breeding should be done responsibly and never for the sake of profit. Unforeseen complications in pregnancy and whelping may lead to an emergency Cesarean Section (surgical delivery of the puppies) or supplemental bottle feedings. Supplemental bottle feedings would increase the health risk, time commitment, and expense involved in breeding. The normal gestation period for a dog (time from conception to delivery) is about 63 to 65 days. Depending on the breed, litter sizes can range from one to 14 puppies. Certain breeds like brachycephalics (dogs with pushed in faces and dome shaped heads) almost always require C-section deliveries because of their anatomies. Puppies are weaned at 5 weeks, vaccinated at 6 weeks, and adopted out at 7 weeks of age. The responsibility of caring for an entire litter of pups in the house requires a lot of time and effort.

Both the male and female dog should have a complete physical examination before breeding when possible. They should be screened for heritable conditions such as hip and shoulder dysplasia, demodex (predilection for mange), hernias, and cryptorchidism (un-descended testes). Dogs with any of these traits should not be bred. The female should be tested and dewormed for intestinal parasites that can be transmitted to the litter. Both dogs should be current on vaccinations.

Pregnant and nursing dogs should be fed 4 to 5 meals daily with a high quality puppy food to provide the extra protein, fat, and calcium they will require to raise a healthy litter. Fresh water should always be available. A whelping bed can be made from a large box with warm blankets. Be sure it is large enough for the mother to arrange and groom her puppies when they are delivered. A heating pad is not recommended because the newborn pups will not be able to cool themselves by moving away from the heat source.

During a natural delivery, it may be necessary to assist the mother in caring for the newborn puppies. Generally, she should be left alone during labor, as anxiety can stop contractions. However, if she cannot tend to the pups in a timely manner, the birth sacs should be removed with a soft washcloth to prevent the pups from suffocating. There will be amniotic fluid in the puppy's mouth and lungs that can be aspirated with a bulb syringe or gently shaken out. Stimulate the puppy fairly vigorously until it begins squirming and crying, then allow the mother to finish grooming it. If the puppy is slow to respond, it should be gently "slung". Cradle the puppy in both hands with its head pointing away from you. Be very careful not to drop it, as it will be very slippery. Gently sling it downward two to three times to force fluid out of the lungs. This will also stimulate the puppy to gasp for air.

Phone numbers for an after-hours veterinarian should be obtained in case emergency care is needed. Labor usually lasts a couple of hours. If more than 20 minutes of contractions elapse without delivering a puppy, or if a partial birth occurs and is not completed after 10 minutes of contractions, this is an emergency situation that requires immediate veterinarian intervention.