

**HEALTHY FARMS LARGE  
ANIMAL VETERINARY SERVICES**

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How to be a Livestock Doula:

Lot's of clients call with questions about birthing farm animals and many want to try and help their without having the vet out. It is always safest and recommended to call your large animal veterinarian for assistance with difficult deliveries. That said, below are some basic guidelines and plans for how to deal with birthing if you cannot directly consult with your veterinarian.

Some reminders for before your animals are due to give birth: Vaccination is best done at 3-4 weeks before the due date to help ensure high-quality colostrum. A fecal test is warranted then also. If you soon-to-be mothers have a high parasite load, and especially if they have coccidia, you want to have time to discuss treatment with your vet. In meat animals, we tend to treat the mothers for coccidia ahead of time. In dairy animals, we tend to treat the kids after birth because coccidiostat medications cannot be used in milking animals.

- 1) Be prepared: Have on hand birthing supplies.
  - a. Clean towels
  - b. Warm water and soap for washing the mother's vulva before attempting an exam
  - c. Long plastic sleeves so that you can do an internal examination if you are going to evaluate before calling your veterinarian
  - d. Latex or nitrile gloves that you can change easily to keep your hands clean
  - e. Sterile, water-based lubricant
  - f. Catheter-tip syringes size 60 mL
  - g. Red Rubber feeding tube (18f is a reasonable size)
  - h. Oxytocin
  - i. Calcium 23%
  - j. Needles and syringes
  - k. Colostrum powder- ideally formulated for the species being born
  - l. Clean twine if you have piglets being born
  - m. Milk tooth nippers if you have piglets being born
  - n. Chains (cattle) or clean twine to attach to legs of newborn if you need to pull animal out.
  - o. A phone so that you can call your vet for help if you need it.
  - p. Teat dip or betadine for dipping udders before labor, for soaking hay string or clean, thick twine to attach to legs if you need to help pull a neonate out of the mother, and for dipping navels.
  - q. Bulb syringe
  - r. Propylene glycol
  
- 2) Monitor the animals before they have babies and call if you notice sheep or goats that are down and unable to rise. Pregnancy toxemia is common in sheep and occurs in goats. Monitor udders/teats and vulvas. Pigs and cows, on the other hand, tend to have problems after the birth of the babies. Both get hypocalcemia (milk fever.)

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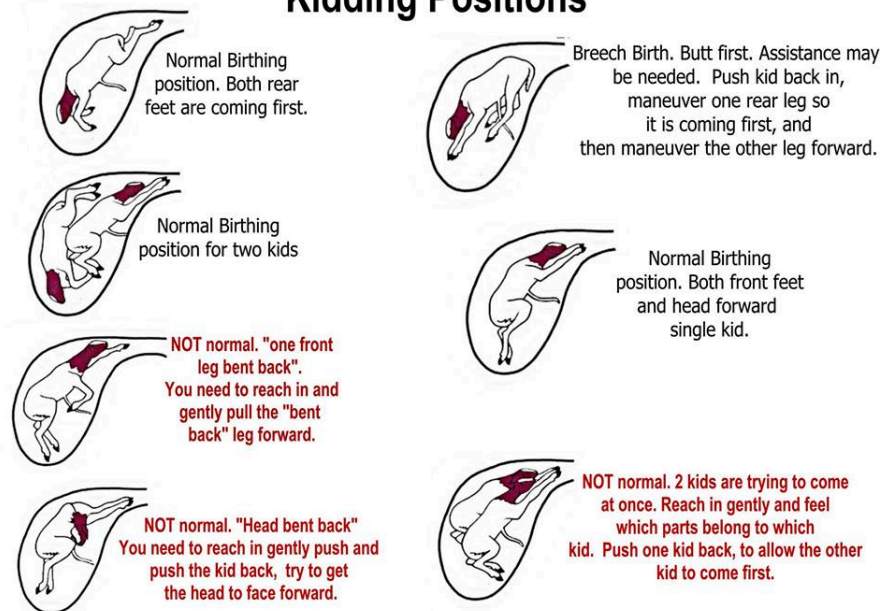
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- 3) When the vulva starts to elongate and become edematous, and the mammary gland fills with milk, your animal is preparing to have her babies. Usually the vulva will be increasingly swollen and elongating for 2-5 days. This is a good time to isolate the mother and have heat lamps ready for the babies if it is cold out.
  
- 4) Once your animal goes into labor, you will notice three stages. Early labor is contractions only as the cervix dilates. Your animal will be restless or have behavior changes. The second stage of labor is pushing out the babies. This is the stage that most people worry about.
  - a. This is a good time to dip teats to help prevent mastitis. The mother will be laying down in birthing fluids and bedding and poop for awhile and it is a nice precaution.
  - b. Once your animals lay down and starts to push, she should make steady, consistent progress. Most animals will produce a neonate with 10-60 minutes of effort. In species where more than one neonate is common, you can multiply this. Pigs can take several hours to deliver a large litter.
  - c. If at any point you see bright red membranes protruding from the vulva of the mother, you should break open those membranes and deliver the baby as quickly as possible and then prepare to help him breathe.
  - d. As long as you are seeing steady progress, there is typically no need to intervene. If the mother is pushing for 30 minutes with no signs of progress, a vaginal exam is warranted.
    - i. Clean the mother's vulva with soap and water. Clean your arms very well (scrub with soap and water including cleaning under your fingernails for 10 minutes) or, better yet, do a quick wash and also use the long plastic gloves you have in your kit.
    - ii. Use plenty of lubricant. I often will use one of the catheter tip syringes to inject lubricant into the vagina.



## Kidding Positions



- ii. Gently introduce your hand into the vagina and feel along the vaginal floor until you get to a thick ring of tissue called the cervix.
- v. If the water has not

broken, you may find a thick membrane covering legs or a head. This is the amniotic sac and will need to be broken before you can deliver the baby.

- v. Once you get your hand on the neonate, you need to figure out which parts are which. Ideally, each neonate is delivered with front feet and head coming through the cervix in that order: the neonate "dives" out of the uterus with straight front legs and the nose stretched to about the level of the knees (carpi). The back of the neonate is close to the back of the mother (vs the back of the neonate being closest to the belly and legs of the mother.)

1. Take care to make sure you have the legs and head of the same baby!

- vi. If you need help holding on, you can use clean (betadine-soaked) hay string or thick twine. Tie loops in the end of the twine and put the free end through the loops to create self-tightening loops. These are applied above the fetlocks of the baby. Do not put tightening twine on the hooves/ankles of the babies.



- vii. Use gentle traction only to help guide the baby out. If you encounter resistance, call your vet!!! You can rupture the uterus or cervix if you pull too hard and you can also harm the baby.

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- e. Once babies are out, it is important to make sure they are breathing right away. The mother will usually lick the fluids and membranes off the face of the baby to stimulate breathing. You can simulate this with the dry towels you have in your kit. Immediately, vigorously rub the newborn's face and nose to stimulate breathing. The bulb syringe from your kit can be useful in aspirating fetal fluids out of the kid/lamb/piglets nostrils. You can also gently squeeze the chest cavity to help them begin to breathe.
  - f. Newborns should hold their own heads up within 2 minutes, have a suckle response within 20 minutes, be up and walking within 2 hrs and nursing successfully within 3 hrs.
    - i. It is really important to make sure the babies are actually latching on and suckling. They should stay on the nipple progressively longer each time and you should hear swallowing and see a tail wag in ruminants (piglets don't do the tail wag so much).
      1. Newborn livestock **MUST** have colostrum in the first 8 hrs of life to thrive. Ideally, they will consume 10% of body weight in colostrum during that time.
      2. If they will not nurse, you should call your vet or, if you are comfortable doing so, tube the animals with colostrum through a red rubber feeding tube. Give 1 oz per tube feeding in animals 6 lbs or less, and 2 oz per feeding in 6-12 lb animals. Only ever use gravity (use the cath tip syringe as a funnel.) See below for photos.
    - ii. If you have swine, it is OK to put the piglets on the nipples the first time or two but other species should not need help standing or nursing.
  - g. While the newborns are learning to nurse, the mother should be going through the third phase of labor, which is passing her placenta.
    - i. If the placenta does not pass, you should give a dose of oxytocin from your kit. 0.5 mL per 100 lbs with a minimum dose of 1 mL. You may repeat this hourly for several doses until the placenta passes.
    - ii. If the placenta still has not passed with oxytocin therapy, contact your veterinarian. Some vets prefer to intervene early and some prefer to monitor. (Caveat: if you have horses, you must call immediately with retained fetal membranes!!)
  - h. It is helpful to offer warm, salty water to the mother directly after birthing. Most ruminants have interest in food quickly. Pigs will often not eat the first day or so after having piglets.
- 5) If you have questions or concerns, always call your veterinarian.

Premier one sells much of the equipment needed. [www.premierone.com](http://www.premierone.com). Here are some nice photos from their website on how to tube a lamb/kid.

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