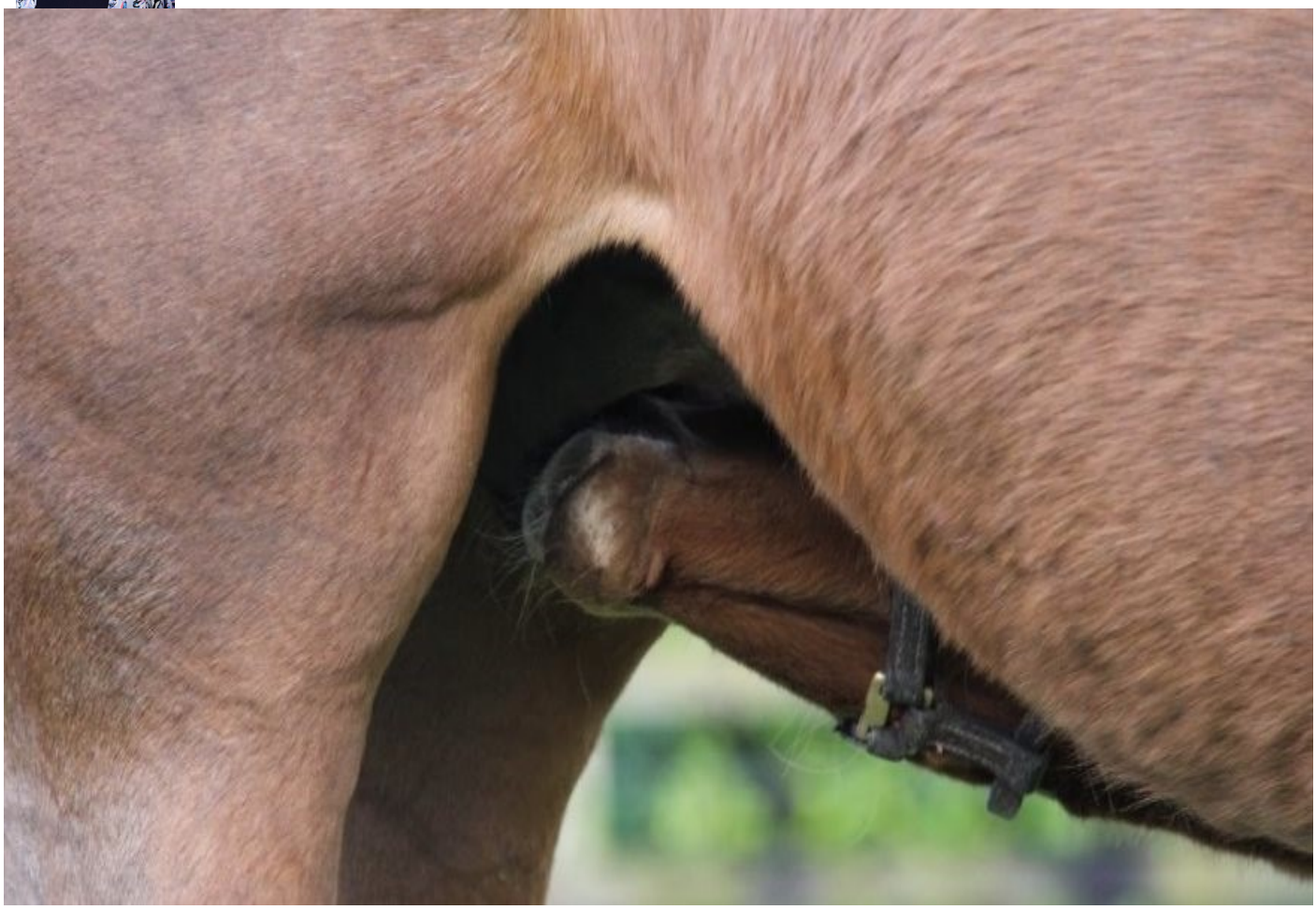
Getting Ready for Foaling

Teagasc Equine Specialist Wendy Conlon talks to An Capaillin about the Importance of Colostrum for newly born foals.



The foal is born with no antibody protection. Colostrum contains high IgG (Immunoglobulin protein antibody) levels. The complex structure of the placenta prevents antibody transfer from the mare to the foal during pregnancy making it vital that the foal receives adequate colostrum immediately after birth.

Adequate colostrum transfer ensures the foal is protected from infection during the first few weeks of life, as its immune system develops.

Vaccinating mares for both influenza and tetanus 4 -6 weeks before foaling will provide the foal with antibodies through the colostrum, offering protection for the first six months of life.

Ensure that mares are in the environment in which they will foal at least 4-6 weeks before foaling, enabling the antibodies which develop and are transferred to the foal to be protective against bacteria in that environment. This maximises protection against infection

Antibodies are large molecules that must be absorbed from the intestine into the blood intact in order to be effective. The foal's gastrointestinal tract has the ability to absorb these IgG's for the first 10-12 hours with maximum intake during the first eight hours after birth.

The specialist ability of the gut wall to absorb the antibodies decreases from approximately 12 hours of age and is gone by the time the foal is 24 hours old.

As soon as the foal is born it is exposed to bacteria in the environment so it is vital that protective antibody levels are present in the bloodstream to reduce the risk of infection. Some stud farms routinely administer 250-300 ml of colostrum to all newborns to ensure intake and encourage passage of meconium (first dung).

How do you know if Colostrum quality is good enough?

Colostrum quality can be checked. Visual inspection will give some indication; ideally colostrum should be rich yellow in colour with a thick, sticky consistency.

How do you know if the foal has consumed adequate Colostrum and what can you do if colostrum is poor or there is inadequate transfer?

Foals can be blood sampled to assess how much colostrum transfer has occurred. A transfer of eight grams/litre (800mg/dl) is excellent; A transfer of four to eight g/l is ok but these foals may require an antibiotic; A transfer of less than four g/l is critical and must be addressed.

Foals with critical levels may require:

A donor mare colostrum (fresh or from frozen) Or a proprietary manufactured colostrum product orally or stomach tube by 24 hours or intravenous plasma after 24 hours. There are no specific clinical signs of failure of passive transfer as the foals act normally until they contract some disease.

Considerations when using frozen colostrum

It is very important to thaw frozen colostrum slowly at room temperature or in a tepid water bath. Do NOT use a microwave or high temperatures as this destroys the proteins/ essential antibodies. Never refreeze again for future use once defrosted.

Feeding supplementary colostrum

One to two litres of good quality colostrum is considered to be protective. Foals should ideally receive this volume within 6-12 hours of birth. Foals with a good appetite should be fed as much colostrum as they will drink.

Foals with a strong suck reflex that are able to stand unaided can be bottle-fed. Always hold the bottle so that the foal's muzzle is lower than its ears and avoid teats with a large hole that the milk runs out of freely. These precautions reduce the risk of milk entering the lungs.

Foals with a weak suck reflex and/or those that need assistance to stand should receive veterinary assistance and be tube fed until they are strong enough to nurse safely.

How to bank/freeze colostrum

Colostrum can be collected from healthy mares with an adequate supply after their own foal has nursed to keep frozen for future use. Once her own foal has suckled well she can have about 250ml milked off for storage without compromising antibody passage to her own foal.

Colostrum can be milked every two hours from a mare which has lost her own foal, until around six hours after foaling. Ensure to wash hands thoroughly and clean thoroughly the mare's udder and teats.

If a mare is at risk of dying colostrum should be milked off before or immediately at her loss.

All containers should be spotlessly clean. This will reduce the level of bacterial contamination in the colostrum.

Milk from both sides of the udder and collect within 12 hours after foaling. Once collected filter the colostrum through a sieve or gauze, cheesecloth or semen filter to remove any debris and place in clean plastic containers or bags for immediate freezing. Date of collection and volume should be written on the container with a permanent marker.

Milk from both sides of the udder and collect within 12 hours after foaling.

Do NOT allow colostrum to sit out at room temperature, as this promotes bacterial growth. If a mare has previously had a jaundiced foal or tested positive for foal jaundice antibodies after foaling it is NOT suitable for freezing.
It is best to check the quality of colostrum before freezing. Frozen colostrum will keep well for a year.

CPBS Rules

For Registering Foals

The following rules apply for registration of foals: Please read carefully

1. All foals, their dams and sires must be tested before being accepted for registration in the CPBS Studbook.

2. DNA samples from the foal/pony should be done by your local Veterinary Surgeon who will also take the markings of the foal.

3. Foals must be registered **before they are six months old or before the 31st December in the year of birth** (whichever is the latest date) to be included in the food chain. Foals not registered within this timeframe are excluded for Department of Agriculture Scheme payments.

4. All foals must be Microchipped for identification and named for life at time of DNA sampling.

5. Payment for foal registration can be done online or by post. If posting, return completed forms to The Connemara Pony Breeders' Society with the appropriate fees

6.In order to be recorded as the breeder of the foal the Dam must be registered in your name

7. A Lifetime Document will be issued for each animal when its parentage is verified to the CPBS by Weatherbys Laboratory, which can take up to 10 weeks. Please ensure not to mix up the contents of kits if DNA typing more than one foal at a time.

8. All foals will be tested for Hoof Wall Separation Syndrome

9. Forms accompanied with the incorrect fees will be returned. Sterling cheques/cash is no longer accepted.

10. Kits are issued strictly in rotation. Please do not book your vet until you have the kit.