Complications During Canine Pregnancy

Dystocia | Eclampsia | Mastitis | Retained Placenta | Agalactia

- A normal canine pregnancy lasts 63 days, which is typically 57-72 days from the day of breeding.
- You can confirm that a mother dog is preparing to deliver her puppies within 24 hours when her temperature drops below 98°F.
- Complications can happen during pregnancy, delivery, and lactation/nursing.
- Be aware of these signs of distress and call your veterinarian if you think the mother dog is experiencing problems.



Dystocia (Difficult birth)

Dystocia is a difficult birth that can result from problems in the birth canal, such as a large puppy, a puppy in the wrong position, or ineffective contractions. **Some breeds are more prone to dystocia**, such as Scottish Terriers, Chihuahuas, Dachshunds, and Yorkshire Terriers. Short-muzzled dogs like French Bulldogs and English Bulldogs have heads that are oversized compared to width of the mother's hips and typically require C-sections. Because puppies grow to fill the space they have in the uterus, puppies in **small litters** of one or two can be larger, creating a difficult to potentially impossible delivery for the mother. **Obesity** is also associated with dystocia, so avoid overfeeding a pregnant mother dog.

Common Signs:

- More than 24 hours since her temperature dropped below 98°F and she hasn't delivered the first puppy.
- Will not eat or drink for more than 12 hours.
- Green-black vaginal discharge before the first puppy is born.
- More than two hours of hard labor before the birth of the first puppy.
- More than one hour between the birth of each puppy.
- Heavy bloody discharge at any time during delivery.
- Visibly distressed: agitated, weak, unable to stand, muscle tremors, vomiting.

Eclampsia (Low calcium)

Eclampsia is a condition of low calcium in the mother dog that can result from the high energy required of her during pregnancy and lactation. Small dogs with large litters, first-time mothers, and mother dogs fed unbalanced diets are at high risk of eclampsia. **Eclampsia most often occurs 1-4 weeks after delivery of the puppies**, during peak lactation.

To prevent eclampsia, feed mother dogs a complete and balanced diet for "all life stages" of correct portions for her stage of pregnancy. Food labeled for "maintenance" is not adequate for a pregnant or lactating mother. **Do not supplement the mother dog with calcium during pregnancy**. Calcium supplements during pregnancy (including foods high in calcium like yogurt) can cause eclampsia. It is safe to give calcium supplements after the puppies are born, at the recommendation of your veterinarian.

Common Signs:

- Mother dog stops taking care of her puppies.
- Itchy face.
- Restlessness/nervousness.
- Muscle tremors.
- Stiff gait when walking.

Mastitis (Mammary gland infection)

Mastitis is the bacterial infection of the breasts in the mother dog. It can be caused by trauma to the mother dog from her puppies as they scratch and bite her while nursing, or contamination from dirty bedding. With mastitis, **the mother dog may develop a fever, look ill, and her breasts may become red, swollen, hot, and painful**. It can happen to one gland (breast) or multiple glands and is usually seen in the first two weeks postpartum. To help prevent mastitis, clip puppies' nails to reduce trauma to the mother dog, wash and shave the hair around her breasts, and keep all bedding clean.

Common Signs:

- Fever.
- Lethargy (Low energy, unusually sleepy, or slow to respond).
- No interest in food or water.
- Swelling, redness, heat, pain, and/or inflammation of one or more mammary glands.
- Abnormal milk production (Fluid is clear or blood-tinged).



Retained Placenta

A retained placenta is a placenta that does not pass during whelping (birthing). **A placenta surrounds each puppy in the uterus** and is delivered separately from the puppy during birth, sometimes alternating puppy, then placenta, then puppy, then placenta. It is common for some placentas to be missing during delivery. **Retained placentas typically do not cause problems** for the mother dog, but inflammation and infection are possible consequences.

Common Signs:

Fever.
Lethargy.
No interest in food.
Foul-smelling, thick red or brown cloudy vaginal discharge.

Agalactia (Poor milk supply)

Agalactia is the poor milk supply of the mother dog after giving birth. **This can be seen as no milk production or difficult release of her milk** from her mammary glands (breasts). Agalactia can be caused by poor nutrition of the mother dog, stress, too warm of an environment, an early C-section, or illness.

Common Signs:

Puppies are trying to nurse but are not gaining weight.
Mother dog's mammary glands don't feel full.
Mother dog's mammary glands feel full but won't express milk.

When *NOT* To Breed Your Dog

- Your dog is very young or very old.
- Your dog is overweight or obese.
- Your dog experiences health problems.
- Your dog has bitten somebody.

Sources

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