**Dog breeding advice:**

Progesterone blood testing:

Progesterone blood tests are useful as not only do they give the breeder the date of ovulation and therefore a more accurate day for mating, they also give a more accurate idea of when a bitch will whelp. This is useful not only for making sure everything is ready for the expectant mum but also in the worse case scenario if she needed a caesarean it helps the vets to know that they are not doing surgery either too early or too late. Bitches usually whelp 61 to 65 days post ovulating NOT post mating.

Ideally start progesterone blood testing from around day 8 of season. Blood test every other day until receive estimated day for mating.

Herpes vaccines:

This is a vaccine which can be given to a pregnant bitch to help prevent mortality of puppies in their first few days of life caused by the canine herpes virus.

The first vaccine is usually given 7 to 10 days after the first mating. The second vaccine is given 7 to 14 days before the bitch is due to whelp.

Diet:

Ideally feed a food that has been designed for pregnant bitches such as Royal Canin HT42D which contains nutrients to support first stage of the reproductive cycle. This should be fed from first day of the season until day 42 of pregnancy. After day 42 move onto a diet such as Royal Canin Starter Mother and Babydog which is designed to support the mother’s high energy needs at the end of gestation and throughout lactation. The puppies can also be weaned onto this at around 3 weeks of age.

Worming :

The pregnant mother can be wormed with Panacur 10% oral suspension, which should be given daily from day 40 of pregnancy continuously until 2 days post whelping.

Once the pups have arrived, both mum and pups should then be wormed again when the puppies are 2 weeks of age, and then every 2 weeks (depending on which product you choose to use) until the pups go to their new homes at 8 weeks of age. There are various products that are safe to use such as panacur paste, panacur suspension, drontal puppy suspension or milpro puppy tablets.

Whelping area:

This should be somewhere that is quiet and away from other pets, and somewhere that is easy to control the temperature of the room. It’s a good idea to have a room thermometer close to where the pups are to monitor room temperature. Room temperature for newborn puppies should be maintained at approx. 29.5-32C for first four days, the temperature can then be gradually reduced to approx. 26.7C by day 7 to 10, then gradually reduced to approx. 22.2C by the end of week 4.

Ideally it should have room for some kind of bed or comfy chair for you as someone will need to keep a close eye on the expectant mother day and night for at least one week before the due date of whelping and probably for at least one to two weeks after the pups are born in case the pups arrive earlier than expected or the mother is a bit clumsy with the pups after they are born or any of the newborn pups are struggling.

The whelping box should be large enough for the mother to be able to stretch out in fully and have enough room for the pups to be able to move about as they grow, but not so large that the pups can move too far away from the mother which could cause her to become anxious and therefore not settle to feed the pups. A pig rail in the whelping box can also be useful to help prevent pups being squashed against the side of the whelping box.

Vetbed is probably the best bedding to use in the whelping box as it is comfy for the mother, has good heat retention for the pups and also good drainage properties helping to keep the pups dry. It’s easy to wash and quick to dry. Make sure it fits the size of the whelping box well and have at least 3 pieces available as it will need changing daily or more. Puppy pads can be useful to use during the birthing process to absorb most of any fluids.

Ideally the mother shouldn’t be able to wander too far away from the pups as some mothers can lose interest in the pups if they’re allowed to spend too much time away from them. A puppy pen is useful to have and should be big enough to have the whelping box in but still have a small area where the mother can come out of the whelping box away from the pups if she wants to rest (it can also then be used later to confine and keep lively pups safe as they get older and become more inquisitive).

Get the mother used to spending time in the whelping area and bed at least one week before she is due to have the pups so that she is relaxed in there when the pups arrive.

Preparation:

Make sure you know who and where your emergency vets are in case of any emergencies out of hours of your usual vet.

It can be useful to take the rectal temperature of the expectant mother once or twice daily for at least one week before she is due to have her pups (if she’ll let you without becoming stressed) and try to take temperature at a similar time each day. The temperature should stay fairly similar each time but quite often (but not always) the temperature will have an obvious drop of around 1 degree approx. 12 to 24 hours prior to whelping.

Disposable rubber gloves are useful for handling newborn pups.

Have plenty of towelling towels ready to help dry newborn pups as soon as possible after birth so they don’t become too cold.

It is a good idea to have some puppy milk and feeding bottles just in case for any reason the mother can’t feed the pups or in case any of the pups require supplementation. Royal Canin Babydog milk is a good quality one and also has a feeding bottle enclosed with it.

First stage labour:

This is when the uterus starts to contract and the cervix begins to dilate. The bitch usually becomes restless, doesn’t want to eat (although the occasional mother to be will continue to eat the whole time), starts panting, shivering and digging up her bed. She may vomit up any food recently eaten and frequently pass small amounts of faeces.

Second stage labour:

This is when the pups begin to be delivered and can usually last approx. 2 to 12 hours but sometimes last approx. 24 hours.

Contractions begin. A water sac is usually the first thing to be passed. The first puppy should hopefully arrive within the next 10 to 30 minutes and quite often puppies will then begin to arrive approx every 10 to 30 minutes after each other. However it’s not unusual for the mother to rest for an hour or so where there will be no straining. Keep a very close eye on the bitch during the whelping, it’s a good idea to make a note of the actual time pushing begins and the time a puppy arrives so that you get an idea of what is normal for her.

When the puppy arrives the mother should hopefully deliver the puppy herself, open the sac and chew the umbilical cord. However some mothers (especially first time mothers) can be reluctant to do this in which case you would need to break open the sac with your fingers, clear any liquid/mucous from the nose and mouth using a towelling towel/cloth and cut the umbilical cord. It is a good idea to wear disposable gloves whilst handling the pups initially. The cord needs to be cut no less than one inch distance from the puppy, ideally use some clean heavy cotton thread to tie two knots and then cut the cord between the two knots with clean scissors. Encourage the mother to clean the pup and hopefully the pup will want to suckle straight away. If the mother isn’t cleaning the puppy then you will need to rub the puppy with a clean towel which will stimulate it to breathe and help dry the pup, ideally do this until the pup starts to cry which helps to clear any fluid from the airways.

Third stage labour:

A placenta should be passed with each puppy which the mother might eat and is quite normal, but try and count the placentas to make sure none have been retained which could cause complications later.

Once all the pups have arrived remove any soiled bedding and give clean dry bedding, hopefully the mother will begin to settle down to feed the pups. Encourage her to have something to eat (keep her on puppy food for as long as she is feeding the pups) and to go out to the toilet. She may pant and be a little restless initially which can be quite normal and it is a good idea to still keep a close eye on the mother for at least the first few days to make sure she doesn’t accidentally stand on or lie on pups.

How do I know if my bitch is having problems?

Each puppy should arrive within one hour of active, visible abdominal contractions or 4-6 hours of intermittent contractions. It may be time to call your vet for advice if any of the following situations are occurring:

* 30 minutes of strong contractions and no puppy produced;
* More than 2 hours of weak contractions and no puppy produced;
* 3 or more hours between puppies being produced;
* You can see/feel a pup at the vulval entrance but the bitch or you are unable to deliver it.

Possible problems after the litter is born:

It’s really important to keep a close eye on the wellbeing of the mother after she has had her litter as there are various problems that can arise within hours, days or weeks after her having her pups which could require veterinary treatment.

* Keep an eye on how many placentas are produced – there should be a placenta for each puppy. Sometimes the mother will eat the placenta which is fine but make sure you know how many are produced. If you think not all the placentas have been passed call your vet.
* Any signs of temperature, lack of appetite, listlessness, lack of interest in pups could indicate infection.
* Check the mammary glands are not hard, hot or painful and have no abnormal (brown/bloody/smelly) discharge
* A reddish vaginal discharge can be normal for up to the first few weeks after having pups but if it continues for longer or if she has bad smelling or very bloody discharge it is best to seek advice from your vet.

Eclampsia/Hypocalcemia:

This is a life threatening condition, most common in smaller breeds with large litters, but can happen in any breed. Veterinary treatment should be sought immediately. Symptoms can include:

* Twitching
* Weakness
* Nervous/restless
* Pacing
* Salivating
* Stiff painful gait
* Panting
* Disorientation
* Vomiting
* Diarrhoea
* High temperature
* Seizures

Causes –

* Calcium supplementation during pregnancy – this can suppress normal parathyroid hormone production, meaning that when the demand for calcium/milk comes through to supply the pups, the parathyroid gland can’t respond quickly enough to meet the bitch’s needs.
* Loss of calcium from the bitch to the skeletal development of the foetuses during pregnancy.
* Insufficient/poor diet during pregnancy.
* Producing a lot of milk for a large litter.

Unfortunately bitches who have had eclampsia once are more likely to have it again if they have future litters.

Weaning:

For the first 3 weeks the pups will rely solely on mum to feed them. At around 3 weeks of age you can start to introduce them to solids and begin the weaning process. The weaning process should be done very gradually and is usually finished by the time the pups are around 7 weeks of age.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS:

Even though puppies are no longer feeding from their mother, it is a legal requirement that puppies do not leave their litter mates or the premises they were born at until they are at least 8 weeks of age.

It is also a legal requirement that all puppies are microchipped by the age of 8 weeks old by the breeder. Again, it is a legal requirement that microchips must initially be registered to the breeder. Once the puppies have gone to their new homes, the new owners can then transfer the microchip into their ownership.