

CHECKING A MARE FOR PREGNANCY

Between 14 and 16 days after the mare has been covered, the vet returns to the farm to check her for pregnancy using an ultrasound machine.

To prepare for the ultrasound examination, the rectal path is cleared. A small ultrasound wand is held by the vet and inserted into the rectum to give a view of the uterus through the rectal wall.

Viewing the uterus enables the vet to determine whether the mare is in foal or not. If she is not in foal, when she returns to estrus (in "heat"), the vet will collect a culture when she returns to estrus ("in heat"). A cytology exam on this sample can be used to check for bacteria and inflammation, potential reasons why the mare did not conceive.

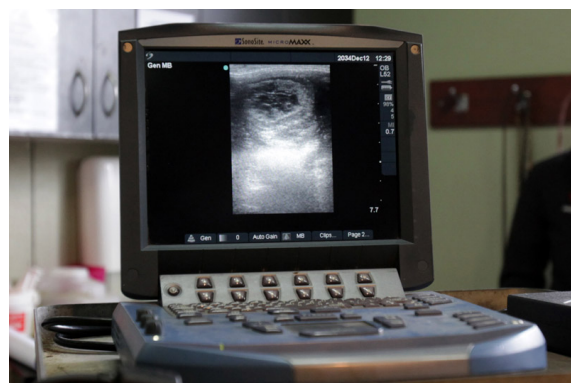
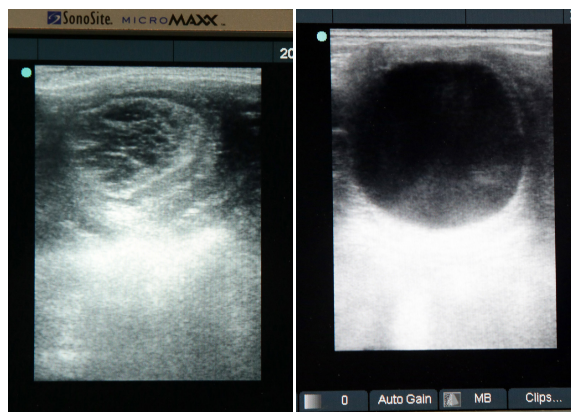
If the culture and cytology exam show no signs of a problem, the mare can be bred back to the stallion a few days later on that same heat. If the culture and cytology do show that bacteria or inflammation are present, the mare is treated and bred back on her next heat three weeks later.

Other reasons for a mare not being in foal include an unhealthy egg or the stallion's semen not living for long enough to fertilize the egg. The likelihood of a mare being pregnant after each cover is between 60% and 70% for well-managed mares.

If a mare is in foal, the first sign of a new life is a small, dark mass appearing on the ultrasound monitor, measuring just over a centimeter.

The organism which will become a foal can first be seen using an ultrasound machine on the 10th day of gestation, but at this stage it is extremely small making it difficult to see. To get the best information, the first exam is performed on days 14 to 16.

One of the great advantages of ultrasound is the early detection of twins. Twins are a headache in mares, since most twin pregnancies result in early foetal loss (slipped pregnancy), late term abortions, or the birth of one or two undersized foals. Additionally, birthing difficulties are very likely with mares attempting to deliver twins.



The reason why detecting twins as early as possible, ie at 14 days of pregnancy, is important, is because if the twins settle in the same horn(side) of the uterus (a position called kissing twins), there is only a short period of opportunity, from day 14-16, when one can be easily "pinched off" without risking the loss of both embryos.

If the twins settle in separate horns of the uterus, one can be removed up to day 26 of the pregnancy without risking loss of the other. However, until the mare has an ultrasound examination, you don't know if she is pregnant at all, or whether she has twins or where they are.

Using ultrasound technology to determine if a mare is pregnant or not provides confirmation earlier than any other method can.

Having good information earlier means those caring for broodmares can make more informed decisions. Ultrasounds are used throughout the 11-month gestation period. A 28-day exam gives a visualization of the heartbeat. There is a checkup exam at day 42 to confirm the mare still has a viable foetus and the mare is at this point confirmed in foal.

