



Client Information: Seasons, Pregnancy and Whelping

Normal Season

Bitches will usually have their first season between 6 and 12 months and male dogs will produce sperm from about 6 months. After a first season bitches will usually cycle approximately every 6 months. The first signs of oestrus are usually a swollen vulva and a bloody coloured vulval discharge, this will last for approximately 9 days. Most bitches will ovulate 9-15 days after the first signs of oestrus are seen and so will be most receptive to the male at this point, some bitches will continue to bleed while others will have a clear vulval discharge at this point. Afterwards the hormonal changes that take place in pregnant and non-pregnant bitches are similar therefore bitches will often continue to have mammary development for weeks after their season even if they are not pregnant.

Ovulation and Pre-mate Testing

Ovulation takes place from 9-15 days after the first signs of oestrus. A blood test can be carried out to measure progesterone and therefore estimate the time of ovulation and the best time to mate. This is useful if the bitch has to travel to the dog. We are able to do Progesterone tests in our in-house lab so can have results within an hour!

Gestation Period

The gestation period can vary from 56 - 65 days. The average is **63 days** from ovulation. When the eggs are ovulated it takes 48 hours from them to be mature enough to be fertilised, this is the reason for variation in gestation period length.

Veterinary Checks

We recommend that bitches are fully vaccinated before mating takes place. Vaccinations are not licenced for use during pregnancy and it is important that the pups receive protection through the first milk, this can only happen if the bitch is vaccinated before pregnancy.

From 5 weeks, pregnancy can be diagnosed by ultrasound examination. This is important both to confirm pregnancy and to make sure there is not a large single pup which could lead to birth complications.

Worming treatments should be given routinely every 3 months and the bitch should be wormed with Panacur 10% every day from day 40 of gestation until 2 days after whelping. This is because some dormant worms can become active during pregnancy and pass to the puppies through the placenta. Both the pups and the bitch should be wormed at 2, 4, 6, 8 and 12 weeks.

Herpes Virus is not covered by standard vaccinations and although uncommon if contracted can result in 100% mortality in litters. Herpes vaccination should be given 7-10 days after mating and 1-2 weeks before whelping. Please notify us in advance if you require this vaccination.

Diet

Feeding a complete adult dog food is enough for the first stages of pregnancy. You may find that your bitch will appreciate smaller meals more often as she gets larger. Most of the puppy growth takes place in the last 2 weeks and so at this point a puppy food can be introduced as this has a higher protein content. After whelping this can continue to be fed but please make any diet changes gradually.

Exercise

Pregnant bitches should be kept active throughout pregnancy (within reason!) and should still get out for walks daily. Towards the end of pregnancy she might become tired easily and so shorter walks more often may suit better.

Whelping

Signs that labour is about to start include loss of appetite, nesting behaviour, panting and a drop in temperature 12 hours before. You should have a quiet area and whelping box set up weeks before to allow your bitch to become familiar and comfortable with it. It should be warm and draught free and have space for the bitch to move away from the pups.

There are 3 stages of labour:

- Stage 1 - panting, nesting, restlessness and occasional vomiting. Can last for 6-12 hours
- Stage 2 - Your bitch will have abdominal contractions which eventually will lead to birth of the first pup. You will see fluid filled sac appear followed by a puppy. The bitch will generally break the sacs and lick the puppy, occasionally you may need to break a sac to allow the pup to breathe. There should not be much more than 1-2 hours between puppies and placentas will be delivered straight after each pup.
- Stage 3 - stage 3 is difficult to decipher in dogs as each placenta is passed with the pup.

The bitch should not be disturbed as far as possible but signs that assistance is required include:

- Active straining for 30 mins and no puppy delivered
- Green/black vulval discharge
- Over 3 hours since last puppy and still puppies inside

We hope that breeding from your bitch will be a problem free enjoyable experience but please call us if any of the above symptoms occur. Remember that any bitches suffering from long term health problems and have any defects such as umbilical hernias should not be bred from. Breeding pups is a big commitment and you should be in a position to ensure good homes are available for all of the pups.