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*A Tradition of Leadership and Excellence in Equine Medicine*

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## **Twin pregnancies in mares** **Faith E. Hughes, D.V.M., Diplomate, A.C.V.S.**

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Unlike many other species, horses are designed to have only one offspring at a time. When twins are conceived, it is **extremely rare** that the pregnancy goes to term uneventfully and that two live foals are born that survive to become normal adults. There are some natural mechanisms in place to prevent twin births. It is common for the mare to lose both embryos once her body recognizes twins. If this does not occur early, it may occur later in pregnancy in abortion. If twins are maintained full-term, the delivery is often a complicated dystocia, resulting in the birth of one or two non-viable foals. If both foals are born alive, they are usually weak and small and do not survive.

The solution to twin pregnancies, which occur with greater frequency in Thoroughbreds and draft breeds, is early recognition and correction. Mares should be evaluated with an ultrasound machine 14-15 days after ovulation to check for pregnancy and twins. If twins are present, this is the best time to perform a manual twin reduction. The time may vary by a day or two depending on the position of the two embryos in the uterus. If twin reduction is performed at this time, the mare is most likely to maintain her pregnancy. The chances of maintaining pregnancy following twin reduction decrease with time, and although manual twin reduction may be accomplished as late as 30-31 days after ovulation, it becomes much more difficult to successfully perform. Following twin reduction, the mare should be re-checked in 5-7 days to determine if she is still pregnant or if she needs to be rebred.

In situations where a twin pregnancy has been maintained into the end of the first trimester, there is a form of twin reduction available that involves selective euthanasia of one fetus. The technique has been modified and we look forward to improved success rates. The procedure is performed at 110 days of pregnancy and is performed in the hospital using an ultrasound machine. The two fetuses are evaluated for size and health and the weaker of the two is reduced. The success of this procedure is approximately 60%.

The importance in twin pregnancies is recognition and awareness that the outcome is rarely satisfactory. This is defined as loss of foal or mare or both. We strongly believe that reduction of twin pregnancies, as soon as possible, but at 110 days if that is the only option, is preferable to allowing a twin pregnancy to go to full term and should be attempted.