



Health Information from Milford Animal Clinic FAWN HEALTH INFORMATION

As the fawning season is quickly approaching, we would like to take time to review information on fawning, basic neonatal care, and overall fawn management. Early management practices are a vital investment when considering that the fawns are the future of your current deer herd. We will start at the beginning with fawning.

The first stage of labor, which is the dilation of the cervix, often goes unnoticed. You may notice the doe looking uncomfortable, getting up and down, and looking around at her sides. The first stage can take up to 8 hours or more. The second stage commences when the cervix is fully dilated and the fawn begins to come through the birth canal. You may see the amniotic sac followed by front feet and the nose should not be far behind. The second stage ends with the delivery of the fawn. The second stage should not exceed 1-1½ hours. The third stage is the delivery of the placenta and usually takes 4-8 hours.

Dystocia is what we call a difficult and/or prolonged parturition (labor and delivery). Dystocia can occur for many different reasons that fall into two generalized categories: 1) something is wrong with the doe, and 2) something is wrong with the fawn and/or its position. A fat doe tends to experience more fawning problems; therefore, it is important to feed does properly to maintain good body condition into fawning season.

When should you call a veterinarian?

- 1) You think the doe should have fawned and she hasn't.
- 2) Part of the placenta has been hanging out or you have seen fluid drainage for 1½ hours.
- 3) Part of the fawn has been out for 30 minutes and it still isn't on the ground.
- 4) The fluid, placenta, or fawn is stained yellow.
- 5) The toes are pointed down instead of up. (This usually occurs with a backward fawn.)

When fawning out on pasture, it is important that the environment is clean, dry, and free from hazardous debris and mud. Watch pregnant does closely during fawning time and refer to the questions above as to when to contact a veterinarian regarding complications.

Superior fawn health starts at birth. The key to ensuring healthy fawns is to get the proper amount of colostrum into the fawn within the first 12 hours of birth. Colostrum is the first milk that any mammal produces. It has a high concentration of large particles called "antibodies," which are the fawn's first immunity. Fawns do not have their own immunity until several weeks after they are born. Since the best, most natural colostrum is from the doe, it would be ideal for the fawn to be left on the doe for the first 24 hours of life to ensure that they receive adequate colostrum. It is important that does are vaccinated with the appropriate vaccines, which reflects the quality of the colostrum being passed onto the fawns. We realize that in some situations this is not an option; therefore, every fawn pulled from the doe at birth should receive 2-3 ounces of good quality colostrum for three consecutive feedings within the first 12 hours of life. Fresh or frozen colostrum needs to come from farms that have a history of healthy, vaccinated does. It is important that colostrum is handled, stored and fed in a sanitary fashion. Fawns that receive sufficient amounts of colostrum seem to do well and those that do not, seem to struggle and are not likely to thrive or survive. In addition, any newborn fawns that are being handled should have the naval dipped with iodine.

While the management of fawns that are kept on the doe versus being bottle fed varies, the overall health of neonatal animals is greatly dependent upon a keen caretaker, who is able to prevent and detect problems as they arise. It is important to evaluate the general health of all fawns on a daily basis and when in doubt perform a complete examination of individual animals. A physical exam is an overall picture of the animal that identifies what is normal and what is abnormal. A complete physical includes evaluating every aspect of the animal from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail. You should first begin looking at the fawns from the outside of the pen. Is the fawn resting comfortably or does it seem to be in distress? Is the fawn breathing fast, normal, or slow? Is the fawn aware of its surroundings or does it seem depressed? Is the fawn moving and holding its head normally or does it seem weak?



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The next aspect of your physical exam is hands on. The first thing you should do is take the fawn's temperature. A normal temperature is 101.0°F. An elevated temperature indicates either a viral or bacterial infection. If the temperature is below 99.0°F the fawn is chilled and needs to be warmed up by using warm water bottles, warm blankets, supervised heating pads, or moving the fawn indoors. The fawn should be warmed before feeding to allow the gastrointestinal tract to function correctly. Next feel the fawn all over and ask yourself if anything feels swollen or hard. Make sure you include around the jaw, abdomen, belly button, all of the joints, and inside the mouth. Finally, look at the stools and decide if they are normal or if the fawn has diarrhea. If diarrhea is present, what is the color, consistency, and does it have an odor?

After you have evaluated the fawn, ask yourself is the fawn eating as often and as much as it has in the past? How is the fawn eating and acting in comparison to other fawns of similar age? You also want to consider if the fawn has as much vigor when it eats as usual. This consideration will be different depending on if you pasture raise or bottle-feed your fawns.

Once you have gathered all of your information you can decide if treatment is needed, and if so, what is the proper way to treat the fawn. We highly recommend working with your veterinarian to come up with a protocol on how to treat different diseases and conditions. Once you have a protocol in place you are able to correctly and safely treat your fawns. When treatments are warranted, we recommend keeping treatment records that include the individual fawn's daily physical exam findings (i.e. the temperature, attitude, description of appetite, diarrhea, medications given, etc.) When treating and feeding fawns, it is always a good management practice to handle healthy animals first and work your way to the sick animals, as to try to minimize the spread of infection. If at any point you have questions, the treatment is not working correctly or you do not have a protocol in place, call your veterinarian right away. A large amount of fawn death can be prevented by asking questions! And always remember to use the correct dosages on medications. If a little is good, more is NOT better.

In addition to medical treatment, it is important to focus on management practices when raising livestock of any type and age. When fawns are kept on the does, it is important to keep the pens free from debris; provide clean, fresh water; and if possible keep pens from becoming excessively muddy. During times of heavy rainfall, many herds have been struggling with "lumpy jaw," characterized by oral lesions and loss of appetite and/or foot rot, both of which are spread by the bacterium *Fusobacterium necrophorum*. The bacterium lives in the soil and gains entry through the skin as a consequence of injury caused by sharp pieces of stone, metal, wood, stubble, thorns, and frozen manure.

Bottle fed fawns require more effort and attention to detail. They are generally more susceptible to diseases as they are handled more frequently and housed in close proximity to other fawns. In preparation for the fawning season all equipment such as the pens, bottles, nipples, etc should be cleaned and disinfected. Fawns should be housed in a clean, dry, and well ventilated environment, free from debris. After every feeding, it is important to clean and disinfect all equipment that has come into contact with the milk and the fawns.

If you follow these simple recommendations and management tips you are well on your way to a successful 2012 fawning season.

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