

Whelping (Giving Birth) in Dogs

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Whelping box

The big day is fast approaching. You should have all of the supplies ready and waiting at least a week before the expected due date.

The whelping box is the single biggest item needed. It should provide enough room for the bitch to lay and stretch out comfortably without being so big that the puppies get 'lost.' For large breed dogs, it is also nice if a person can sit in the box with mom during labor and delivery and to play with the puppies later. The floor must be level and stable. The sides should be high enough to keep 4-week-old puppies in, but be hinged or have a door so the bitch can come and go. The sides may set inside the edges of the floor. This allows a blanket to be stretched tight over the floor and held in place by the sides. A safety rail is necessary around the entire perimeter. This allows the puppies to fit underneath in case the bitch lays down and they are in the way. It should be high and wide enough for a month-old puppy to fit under. The whelping box should be set up in a warm, quiet, safe location.

A heat lamp should be placed high enough that the bitch cannot contact it, but close enough to heat the area. It should only heat a corner of the whelping box, so if the puppies are too warm, they can move away from the heat source. The heat lamp light should be diffused with aluminum foil with holes poked in it with a needle. This protects the bulb from accidental contact and protects the puppies eyes from bright light.

Newspaper can be put in the whelping box during delivery. As it gets wet more layers are added. Once she is done whelping and is taken outside to relieve herself, the entire box is changed and dry paper put in with a blanket stretched tight over the top to give puppies traction.

Whelping supplies

Have large plastic garbage bags handy to place used newspaper, paper towels, and other garbage.

A laundry basket or box should be available to place puppies in while the rest of the litter is born. This protects them while the bitch paces and moves around during labor. A heating pad should be placed on the bottom with a fleece pad over it. (The puppies should NEVER be placed directly on heating pads, as they may be burned.) Another 1 or 2 towels should be placed over the top of the basket to keep the heat in. The fleece and the air in the basket should feel comfortably warm to your hand. If the puppies are moving around and crying, they are too cold or too hot. If they are bobbing their heads, searching, and crying, they are hungry. They should be put with mom as soon as possible to nurse. The puppies can be placed with the bitch between births to allow them to nurse and bond, and if necessary, be put back in the basket while the next sibling arrives.

A large stack of soft, clean towels should be handy to help clean off puppies if necessary. Large litters may require 2-3 dozen towels. White or light colored towels will show the color of any discharge or placenta. Have a laundry basket handy to throw them in as they are used. Wash as soon after birth as possible with detergent and bleach to minimize staining of the towels. An easy alternative is to use paper towel that can be discarded.

**NEVER USE WOOD
SHAVINGS FOR
PREGNANT OR
NEWBORN
ANIMALS.**

Other supplies to have on hand include the following:

1. Sterile hemostats and blunt-end scissors to cut the umbilical cord, if necessary
2. Alcohol and matches to sterilize the hemostats and scissors (dip the instrument in the alcohol, hold downward, light with a match - do not hold upward, as the alcohol (and fire) will go down your hand)
3. Heavy sewing thread, dental floss, or suture (to tie umbilical cords if necessary)
4. Lubricating (petroleum) jelly
5. Several pairs of sterile surgical gloves
6. Rubber pediatric bulb syringe or other suction device to clear airways
7. Surgical antiseptic scrub/iodine
8. Tube feeder, syringe, bottle and nipple, and puppy milk replacer (such as Esbilac)
9. Gram or ounce scale depending on average size of newborn puppy for your breed
10. Stethoscope
11. Nail polish to mark puppies for identification (puppies look remarkably similar and the best way to identify them is with marks)
12. Thermometer – rectal to monitor the bitch's temperature

13. Household thermometer to monitor the air temperature in the whelping box
14. High-quality puppy food, cottage cheese, vanilla yogurt, and/or vanilla ice cream for the bitch
15. Fresh water for the bitch
16. Regular number for veterinary clinic and the emergency veterinary clinic number
17. Numbers for family/friends/sitter to watch the children during delivery and, if necessary, to go to vet clinic
18. Whelping books
19. Vetwrap to wrap the tail of a long-haired bitch
20. Flashlight with new batteries
21. Clock or watch to time the birth
22. Camera, film, and extra battery
23. Something for you to do while waiting – cards, magazines, etc.
24. Ink pen (and an extra) and note pad – mark each pup's arrival time, [sex](#), weight, color, and markings (either natural markings or id mark you apply), and if placenta was expelled
25. Make sure the phone cord reaches the whelping box or that the battery for the cordless phone is charged
26. Cot for you to sleep on



Predicting the delivery time

Average gestation is about 63 days from the date of ovulation, which may be different than the date(s) of breeding(s). Several changes that may be noticeable in the bitch the last week before delivery include a distended, 'dropped' abdomen, enlarged and softened vulva, enlarged nipples, and full mammary glands. Taking her temperature at least twice a day the last 10 days before the delivery date is also helpful. Some bitch's temperatures will drop below 99°F within 24 hours of delivery. This may not be seen in all bitches, but is another indicator. Loss of appetite and nervousness (pacing, panting) alternating with sleep also indicate the time is near.

Preparing the bitch

Clipping the long hair from the underside of the abdomen allows the puppies to find the nipples easier. A bitch may ['blow her coat'](#) in preparation for delivery. Trimming the rear quarters helps keep the mess to a minimum. If she is not kept clean, she should receive a bath before delivery and then be kept in the house.

Remove the bitch's collar before whelping to eliminate a possible hazard to the puppies.

Once labor has begun, do not let her outside except on a leash and bring a towel along in case a puppy is born. Bring a flashlight along if it is nighttime. Check the spot after she urinates for signs of mucus, blood, or other discharge.

Stages of labor

Labor and delivery have three stages. In the first stage, the cervix is being dilated and softened. She may moan, whimper, and pant during labor. Abdominal contractions are not evident in this stage. She may be restless, secretive, and try to hide. This is why the whelping box is in a quiet area in the house. The lights can be dimmed if she is more comfortable. She may shred paper and blankets during this stage also. Stage one may take 12-24 hours. It ends when the first puppy passes into the pelvic canal.



Photo by Ronald W. Glaman

Stage two starts when she begins actively pushing the first puppy out. The first puppy tends to take the longest, as it needs to fully dilate the cervix. Normally, 1-4 strong contractions are necessary to deliver each puppy. She may be very vocal during delivery, and she may stand, lie, or sit with haunches to one side for delivery. She will be more relaxed if those present are relaxed. Some dogs do not want anyone around for the whelping and the owner needs to sit in the corner and watch, while other bitches may want the owner in the whelping box with them.



Photo by Ronald W. Glaman

The amniotic fluid (water bubble) is seen first. The puppy may come head first or rear paws first. Either way is normal. As soon as the puppy is born, the dam should remove the sac from its face. If the bitch does not do so within several seconds, the owner should remove it so the puppy can breathe.



Photo by Ronald W. Glaman

The bitch will start licking the puppy and will not be extremely gentle with the puppy. That is fine, since the puppy needs stimulation to start breathing on its own. He should be giving lusty cries and starting to move around. Within minutes he may be ready to nurse, although some puppies need a short rest to recover from the stress of delivery before they are ready to nurse. The bitch will crush and tear the umbilical cord about 1-3 inches from the puppy's body depending on size.

If she does not, clamp the cord between 2 hemostats and tear it or cut it. If the umbilical cord bleeds, tie it off with the suture. If you need to pick up the puppy, keep him in a head-down position to allow fluid to drain out of the lungs and nasal passages. Once the puppy is crying loudly and clearly, the lungs are clear.

The third stage of labor is the delivery of the placenta. Each puppy has a placenta and it is usually delivered with the puppy. Keep track of the placentas on the notepad, as she may have two puppies and then 2 placentas. The bitch will usually eat the placenta. After two or three, the owner can remove some of them to prevent her from eating them all. The placenta does offer nourishment to the bitch, but too many may cause diarrhea or vomiting.

She will repeat the second and third stages of labor until all the puppies are born. Some bitches will have 2-3 puppies in 20 minutes and then break for a couple of hours, while others take 2-3 hours per puppy. As long as she is comfortable and not contracting forcefully, monitor closely. If she is contracting forcefully and no puppy is born, call your veterinarian. If it seems too much time has passed or you are worried, call your veterinarian for advice. If x-rays have been done to count the number of fetuses, you will have a better idea when you are done. Do not count on complete accuracy in fetal numbers from the x-ray.

Allow the dam to eat and drink small amounts during labor and delivery if she wishes. She may prefer small amounts of cottage cheese or yogurt in addition to her regular food.

Allow the puppies to nurse between deliveries. After the first puppies have nursed, allow the newcomers a chance to nurse without having to fight off their older siblings. The puppies are only able to absorb the [colostrum](#) through their intestines for the first 24 hours of life. After that time, they are no longer able to get any protection from disease from the dam. The bitch should be licking their perineal area to stimulate urination and defecation. She will continue this for 2-3 weeks.

Dystocia: Difficult labor and delivery

Difficulty during labor and delivery is called 'dystocia,' and there can be multiple causes.

Owners of breeds who are prone to dystocias (those with large heads and shoulders such as Bulldogs, Pugs, and Boston Terriers) should discuss the possibility of a cesarean section with their veterinarian several weeks prior to the due date. Some breeders of these breeds will automatically schedule a c-section.

Whelping records

It is important to keep accurate records during the delivery. A sample record is shown below (although records of weight gain should be kept longer than 3 days). Keeping such records will help you recognize problems early, and be a way to follow each puppy during their first weeks of life. As puppies are born, breeders use different methods to identify them and keep track of them. One way is to put a dab of blue (male) or (pink) nail polish on the hip or shoulder of the puppies.

Whelping Record For 'Sydney' 1/5/2000								
Births	Time	Male/ Female	ID Marking	Weight	Placenta	Weight Day 1	Weight Day 2	Weight Day 3
#1	12:10 P.M.	Male	Blue Right Hip	16 oz.	yes	*	*	*
#2	12:25 P.M.	Male	Blue Left Hip	18 oz.	yes			
#3	2:50 P.M.	Female	Pink Right Hip	16 oz.	yes			
#4	4:15 P.M.	Female	Pink Left Hip	19 oz.	yes			
#5	4:45 P.M.	Male	Blue Right Shoulder	20 oz.	yes			
#6	5:30 P.M.	Male	Blue Left Shoulder	15 oz.	yes			
#7	6:20 P.M.	Female	Pink Right Shoulder	16 oz.	yes			
#8	7:35 P.M.	Male	No Mark	15 oz.	yes			

* Record the daily weight of each puppy here.

