

Normal Birth in Cats

(Kindling, Queening)

Preparation for Delivery

You should begin to prepare for the birth of the kittens before the queen (mother cat) gives birth. A box should be provided so that the mother becomes accustomed to sleeping in it and will deliver the kittens there. Most cats prefer a covered delivery box. Food and water can be kept nearby. Place the box in a secluded yet familiar area of the home, away from family traffic, to allow mother and kittens solitude and rest. Newspapers make excellent bedding because they can be changed easily, are absorbent and can be shredded by the mother as she makes her “nest.” If such materials as old quilts, rugs, blankets or mattress pads are used, they should be laundered frequently.

If you want to know more precisely when delivery is near, check the rectal temperature twice daily, starting on the 60th day. Rectal temperature drops below 100° F within 24 hours before the onset of labor. Normal rectal temperature ranges from 100.5° to 102° F.

Labor and Delivery

During the first stage of labor, the queen seems uneasy and restless. She may refuse food or water. The cat’s rectal temperature drops, and she seeks dark, secluded places. Considerable howling may occur. This last stage lasts 12 to 24 hours. In the second stage, uterine contractions and expulsion of the kittens begin. Delivery starts with a small, greenish sac protruding from the vaginal opening. This is followed by a kitten and the attached placenta. The normal presentation of the kitten is nose first, lying on its stomach (“diving” position). Some kittens, however, are born hindquarters first. After the delivery, the mother normally opens the sac by licking and biting, cleans off the kitten and severs the umbilical cord. You may have to perform these functions for the mother if she refuses to do it herself (see Obstetric Care). Make sure the sac is removed from the kitten immediately if the mother doesn’t do so. The third state of labor is a resting stage, which follows delivery of each kitten. This stage may last from a few minutes to 1 hour. Occasionally, two kittens are delivered within a few minutes, followed by resting.

Obstetric Care

After each kitten is born, remove all membranes covering the kitten, clean off its face and remove mucus from its nose and mouth. Rub the kitten with a clean, dry towel to dry it and stimulate breathing and circulation. After a few minutes of rubbing, the kitten should begin to squirm and cry. The umbilical cord should be tied about 1 inch from the body with fine thread and cut on the side of the knot *away* from the kitten. Apply a drop of iodine or merthiolate to the cord end after it is cut.

Assisting with the Birth

If a kitten seems to be lodged in the birth canal and the mother cannot expel it, assistance is necessary. There may not be time to call your veterinarian and drive to the hospital if you wish to save the kitten. Grasp the kitten with a clean towel and exert steady, firm traction. Do not jerk or pull suddenly. The best place to grasp the kitten is by the skin of the back, but gentle traction on the legs may be necessary.

Notify the Doctor is Any of the Following Occur

- You cannot remove a kitten lodged in the birth canal.
- Labor is strong and persistent for 30 minutes without delivery of a kitten.
- Labor is weak and intermittent for 5 hours without any results.
- There is a dark vaginal discharge, and no labor or births have occurred within 3 to 4 hours.
- The pregnancy lasts more than 67 days.