

So Your Dog Is Going To Have Puppies...

When will the puppies arrive?

The whelping date can be estimated as an average of 63 days (9 weeks) after the last mating took place – that's if you can remember when that happened. If not, there are fortunately some signs we can use to get an indication of whether the whelping date is fast approaching or still far off.



The mammary glands develop about 10-14 days before whelping, and there may be milk in the teats in the last 7 days of the pregnancy. In the week before whelping, the bitch may start nesting and avoiding the other pets in the household.



At this time it is a good idea to provide her with a dedicated whelping box. This is a low-walled pen big enough for the bitch to lie in together with the pups. The walls should be high enough to keep the puppies in, but still allow her to get out.

A more scientific way to get a better idea of when whelping will occur is by taking the rectal temperature 3-4 times daily in the last week of her pregnancy. When the rectal temperature drops to 36° C, you could expect the bitch to begin to whelp within the next 12 hours. At this stage she may lose interest in food.

How will I know when she is in labour?



If you have used the rectal temperature method, you will take much of the guessing out of the equation. If you have provided her with a dedicated space for whelping, she will start nesting and scratching there, and will shiver and pant. She may also look at her belly a lot, and seem very uncomfortable. This is the first stage of whelping and can last anything from 6 to 24 hours.

The second stage of labour commences when the abdominal contractions and movement of the foetus into the pelvic canal causes the "water to break". A large volume of clear fluid is released which lubricates the birth canal. The first puppy should be delivered within 4 hours after this happens. Each newborn will be covered in membranes which the bitch will have to break and clean off, allowing the puppy to breathe. She may need help from you with this step.



The third stage of labour takes place when the placenta is expelled after the pup is delivered. Remember there will be one placenta per pup.

What signs should I look for indicating that she is having difficulty whelping?

1. The water broke more than 4 hours ago and no puppy has been born.
2. The bitch is straining weakly and irregularly for more than 3-4 hours.
3. The bitch has strained hard and regularly for more than 30 minutes and no puppy has been born.
4. The bitch has strained for more than 12 hours and no pup has been born.
5. There is a green or brown-brick red discharge from her vulva but no pup is born within 2-4 hours.

How can I help her?

Puppies need to be removed from the membranes, dried and cleaned, and stimulated to breathe as soon after they are born as possible. If the bitch is not doing this or is not finishing the job, you should break the membrane around the puppy and rub the pup vigorously with a towel. You can use an infant nasal cleaner to suck the mucous and fluid out of the mouth and nostrils. The umbilical cord can be tied with cotton or floss 2cm or more from the newborn's body. You should then help the pup to get to its mom's nipples to drink.



What can I expect after the birth?



The bitch will have a discharge for up to 4-6 weeks after whelping. It should remain jelly like and odourless, be reddish brown in colour and reduce slowly.

The bitch will try to eat the placentas when removing them from the puppies, but this can upset her tummy and prevent her from eating properly for the next few days. Rather take the placentas away.

Food and water should be placed close to the whelping box as the bitch may refuse to leave the pups for the first few days. Make sure food is available to her all day.

Inspect her teats daily for redness, tenderness or sores.

