

### **Labour and Postpartum in the Bitch**

There are three stages of labour in the bitch. Each of the three stages of labour has a predictable group of signs and duration. Ensure the bitch has a comfortable and quiet space to labour. Monitor her but be aware that too much interference can cause stress and slow down the process.

Stage 1 labour begins with mild uterine contractions and progressive cervical dilation. This stage lasts 6–12 hours, but if this is the bitch's first litter it may persist for up to 24 hours. Behavioural signs associated with stage 1 labour include nesting, panting, and restlessness.

Stage 2 labour is the active expulsion of the puppy from the birth canal with strong uterine contractions and straining. Clear vaginal discharge is seen as stage 2 labour begins and precedes each puppy. The first puppy is normally delivered within 30 minutes of the start of stage 2 labour but may not be delivered for 2–4 hours. Stage 2 labour should be complete within 12–24 hours, with a puppy produced approximately every 30 minutes to 4 hours.

Stage 3 labour is the expulsion of the placenta(s), which takes place 5–15 minutes after the delivery of each puppy. Multiple placentas may be passed after several puppies are delivered close together. It is normal for the bitch to chew off the umbilical cord and ingest the placenta after parturition.

Postpartum findings in the bitch may include transient vomiting and diarrhoea and lochial discharge (discharge from the vagina). Lochial discharge is normal after parturition and is associated with uterine involution (the uterus returning to its pre-pregnancy size). The discharge is green to red-brown, odourless and can persist for up to 6 weeks.