

Twinning in Horses

The incidence of twins in horses is high. Unfortunately, 99% of twins do not survive. The few twins that are born alive are usually small, weak and unthrifty. With the use of ultrasound we can detect pregnancy as early as 14 days from the last day of breeding. Twins can also be detected this early, and the veterinarian is able to pinch one of them rectally, so that only one embryo remains. Occasionally, both embryos will die due to the trauma of the pinching procedure. This is one of the possible risks of pinching a twin; however, the benefits outweigh the risk. After pinching a twin, the mare is given progesterone (Regumate) and Banamine to promote the survival of the remaining embryo.

Twins are not always detected at 14 days. Sometimes one twin will be too small to detect. This is why we always recommend a second ultrasound around 24 days to ensure the absence of twins. Keep in mind, however, if you bring your mare for an ultrasound after 24 days, the embryos become too large to pinch. If you bring your mare for an ultrasound after 35 days the embryos are too large to be seen simultaneously on the ultrasound screen and one could be missed. We recommend the first ultrasound be scheduled between 14 and 17 days post-breeding and the second ultrasound between 23 and 26 days post-breeding. Should you neglect to do this, you could run the risk of your mare aborting twins, or worse, carrying them to term.