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Good Survival Rates After Uterine Tear Repair

While rare, uterine tears in mares can occur during dystocias difficult births) and normal deliveries alike and come with serious consequences, including death. Until recently, there had been few large-scale studies evaluating the signs and treatment of and prognosis for these lacerations.

So Kevin Claunch, DVM, Dipl. ACVS, associate surgeon at Weems & Stephens Equine Hospital, in Aubrey, Texas, performed a retrospective study of uterine tear cases and presented his findings at the 2015 American Association of Equine Practitioners Convention, held Dec. 5-9 in Las Vegas.

He partnered with practitioners at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital, in Lexington, Kentucky, to evaluate 92 cases that veterinarians saw at the clinic from 1986 to 2012. Most mares were Thoroughbreds of all ages and number of pregnancies. They typically arrived at the clinic two days post-foaling presenting with a variety of complaints—most commonly colic, said Claunch. One-third of the mares had a normal birth, one-third had a dystocia, and for one-third how the birth went was unknown. Sixty percent of tears were located in the uterine horns, 34% were in the uterine body, and the locations of 8% were unspecified. Tears of the horns were more common in the right horn (75%) than the left (25%).

Eighty-nine of the 92 mares underwent surgery to correct the tear, three of which were euthanized during surgery.

"We saw a high amount (23%) of additional pathology (anything that required additional surgical treatment or altered the surgeon's course of treatment) besides a uterine tear within the abdomen," noted Claunch.

Most mares received antimicrobials for at least five days post-surgery.

Regarding prognosis, Claunch observed that:

- 69 mares (81%) survived with treatment;
- Seven mares (8%) died in recovery;
- Three mares (3%) died at least 24 hours post-surgery;
- 64% of mares (18/28) bred that year after recovering from surgery carried a foal to term; and
- 77% of mares (33/43) bred the subsequent year carried a foal to term.

Contrary to women who suffer uterine tears and are at a high risk of reoccurrence, none of the mares experienced another documented tear, said Claunch.

He determined that mares treated for uterine tears have a good prognosis for life and a fair prognosis for future breeding potential. "Early surgical intervention aids in definitive diagnosis of uterine tears, detecting concurrent pathology, and repairing the uterine defect," he said.