How long are dogs pregnant for?

From the time that the bitch releases her egg (ovulation) to the time of labour (called whelping) is about 63 days.

However, it is difficult to predict whelping dates because:
- The length of pregnancy is determined from the ovulation date, not the mating date
- The sperm from the male dog can remain alive for up to 7 days.

This means that pregnancy can vary from 56 to 72 days if calculated from the day of the first mating to the day of giving birth.

What changes will I notice if my bitch is pregnant?

- Some bitches have a reduced appetite 3-4 weeks after mating
- Some have a mucus discharge from their vulva one month after mating
- The teats may begin to become pink and firm
- The bitch’s weight increases from 35 days onwards and may increase by up to 50% of normal
- The mammary glands enlarge from day 40, and a watery fluid may come from the nipples

How will my vet know if my bitch is pregnant?

**Feeling the abdomen**
- This is most accurate at about one month after mating
- It can be difficult in obese or nervous dogs
- After 35 days it becomes more difficult to feel the pups.

**X-ray**
- This can be useful in quiet bitches but may be avoided if the bitch needs sedation for the x-ray to be taken
- After day 45, the skeletons of the pups can be seen
- It is unlikely that the x-rays will damage the pups after day 45.

**Ultrasound**
- This is the most commonly used method to find out if a bitch is pregnant but it is not possible to say how many pups are present
- The bitch may have to stay at the surgery for a few hours, she will have her tummy clipped and jelly applied to her belly
- Most accurate one month after the last mating
- Heart beats can be seen from around 22 days
- Early examinations may be inaccurate and the ultrasound may need repeating after 10-14 days.
Worming during pregnancy

During pregnancy, the parasitic worms of dogs are at their most active. They move from the bitch and into the pups, through the placenta and can infect the liver, lungs and intestine of the pups. Once the pups are born, the worms can pass through the milk and into the pups. For these reasons it is essential to worm the bitch throughout pregnancy and during lactation. We recommend:

**Panacur** - Given by mouth to the bitch every day from day 40 of pregnancy to 2 days after whelping
Given by mouth to the pups for 3 consecutive days at 2 weeks, 5 weeks and before leaving the breeders premises

Feeding during pregnancy

Before breeding it is recommended to feed the bitch on a good quality, complete, adult dog food. This should be fed at the normal levels during pregnancy. However, it is important to keep an eye on the bitch’s body condition. As her abdomen becomes full of puppies she may need to be fed smaller more frequent meals. A good way of doing this is to feed puppy food because it is high in calories but less volume needs to be eaten. You are welcome to bring the bitch in for regular weight checks throughout pregnancy.
WHHELPING

Most bitches are able to have their pups without any interference from the vet. It is helpful for owners to understand what happens in a normal labour. Labour is divided into three stages, with the last two stages being repeated for each puppy delivered.

**First Stage**
- The behaviour of the pregnant bitch changes
- Usually lasts between 6-12 hours but can last up to 24 hours
- The bitch’s rectal temperature is low (less than 37°C)
- The bitch feels uncomfortable, may glance her tummy and become more restless
- She may pant a lot
- She will show nesting behaviour such as tearing up and rearranging bedding
- She may occasionally shiver
- Vomiting may be seen
- Contractions start but no straining is seen

**Second Stage**
- The puppies are born
- Usually lasts 3-12 hours but may last up to 24 hours
- The rectal temperature rises to normal or just above normal 37.5-38.5°C
- Straining is seen
- Some clear fluid may be seen and is normal (the water bag has burst)
- The presence of a dark green discharge is normal
- Weak infrequent straining should produce a pup within 2 hours
- The bitch may rest for up to 2 hours between delivery of consecutive pups

**Third Stage**
- The placenta is delivered
- Usually follows within 15 minutes of delivery of each pup
- Two or three pups may be born before their placenta are delivered
- The dam may want to eat the placenta
- She should be discouraged from eating more than one or two as she may develop diarrhoea and vomiting
- The fluid passed after giving birth is called lochia.
- Lochia may be seen for over 3 weeks after giving birth.
Possible Problems

There is a vet available to be contacted 24 hours a day. When the bitch is giving birth, please contact your vet if:

- The bitch has had a greenish/red-brownish discharge but no pup was born within 2 hours
- Clear fluid was passed more than 2-3 hours ago but nothing more has happened
- She has had weak, irregular straining for more than 2-4 hours and no pup has been born
- She has had strong, regular straining for more than 20-30 minutes and no pup has been born
- More than 2-4 hours have passed since the last puppy was born and you think that more remain
- The second stage of labour has gone on for more than 12 hours
- You have any other concerns or questions.

Care of the newborn

After delivery of the pups, the bitch will usually perform the following steps:

- Licking the foetal membranes away from the nose and mouth
- Licking and nuzzling to keep the pups warm
- Biting of the umbilical cord
- Encouraging the pups to suck
- Feeding should occur every 2-3 hours

If the bitch does not perform any of these steps, assistance may be needed. The membranes can be removed by briskly wiping them up with a towel, paying special attention to the mouth and nose. If one of the newborn has difficulty in finding the milk supply, its mouth should be placed over the teat. Pressing either side of the teat with a finger should release milk and so the newborn will be able to feed.

The bitch should be introduced to her whelping box at least a week before whelping. The box should be enclosed to stop the pups escaping and it can be lined with newspaper with vetbed on top. There should be sufficient space to avoid the pups being squashed.

The environmental temperature around the pups for the first 24 hours should be 30-33°C. This should be monitored with a thermometer. Over the following 3-4 days the temperature can be reduced to 26-30°C. The mother should, ideally, have a cooler area to go to.

A healthy pup will crawl around and be very mobile. At about 10 days it will stand and at about 3 weeks of age it will begin to walk. Ten to 14 days after birth the eyes will open. Initially, the bitch will lick the bottom of her pups to stimulate toileting. By 2-3 weeks the pups should be able to urinate and pass faeces without help.