

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

Before the Northwoods Humane Society had a shelter, we did our animal care in our homes and businesses. One evening, 29 years ago, on a snowy icy evening I got a call from Carol Jorgenson. Carol had found a dog lying on Highway B. She brought the dog to our home and we warmed her up and created a space for her. Our other animals were used to new creatures and were accepting of the 'new' dog. The dog was very thin, with a tummy and she was gentle in nature. I had to go to Chicago for a buying conference for our business. My husband Mike and son Chris stayed home and cared for our animals. When I called home on the second night I was greeted with news that the new dog had delivered 6 puppies. I remember Chris' excitement as he told me "Mommy, there was one puppy, then two and now there are 6!" Mike handled it all with his usual calmness and all was well. The wonderful mother was named Bella and she was adopted by super people. They let her stay with her puppies until it was time to wean them and came daily to walk and socialize her. All of the puppies found homes and Bella's family kept touch with some of the adopting families.

I had no idea that Bella was pregnant and about to deliver – so the following is what I should have known if we had gotten her earlier in her pregnancy.

Dogs are pregnant for about **63 days**, which is measured from the day that they ovulate (release their eggs) to the day that their puppies are born. Like people, dogs are pregnant for three trimesters, each about 21 days long. Here are a few ways to tell if your dog is pregnant (the following information is from WebMD):

In the first few weeks, there are very few outward signs, so you may not notice a change. Your dog will seem like their normal self, although they may gain some weight.

Morning sickness affects some dogs, but only for a few days during the 3rd or 4th week. (It's caused by hormone changes.) Your pet may seem tired, and they may eat less than usual. Some dogs throw up a little. If yours does, offer them small meals over the course of the day.

If you think your dog is pregnant, take them to your vet. It's a good idea to take them for a prenatal checkup 2 or 3 weeks after they have mated. Your vet can answer any questions you may have, such as the type of **food** pregnant dogs should eat and what changes you should expect. If your pet needs any tests, your vet will let you know. If they have parasites, your vet will treat them.

During your visit, your vet can use ultrasound to see the growing puppies, typically around 4 weeks in. Ultrasound is safe during **pregnancy**. It uses sound waves to create an image of your dog's womb.

The vet may give your dog a blood test to check their hormone levels. Dogs have higher levels of a hormone called relaxin when they're pregnant.

If you don't take your dog to the vet until their 4th week of pregnancy, the doctor can feel your dog's belly to confirm puppies are on the way. This method can only be used between the 28th and 35th days of pregnancy, and it should be done by someone who is trained. If you touch too roughly, you can harm the

growing puppies or cause a miscarriage. The puppies will be the size of walnuts. They will be spaced out evenly along the uterus, which is shaped kind of like the letter V. Each half, called a horn, will have embryos in it.

By the end of your dog's second trimester, their belly will get bigger. Around this time (by day 40), their nipples will begin to get darker and larger, too. As your pet's due date gets closer, their breasts will enlarge, and a little milky fluid may trickle out.

Your vet may ask you to come back at the start of the third trimester (around day 45) if they want to take X-rays of your dog's belly. This can be used instead of an ultrasound to check on the bone structure of growing puppies. It's one way to figure out how many puppies will be in your dog's litter.

As more time passes, your dog's pregnant belly will become larger, and it may sway gently beneath them as they walk.

During the last 2 weeks of pregnancy, you may see and feel the growing puppies moving inside your dog's belly. Your vet may want to see your pet one final time. Sometimes vets take X-rays during this visit to find out how many puppies are on the way and make sure they are not too big to pass through the birth canal. If they have gotten too big, the vet will schedule a c-section.

The next step will be to learn what to expect when the puppies are coming and how to care for them.