

## Breeders and Newborn Puppies

### Raise the odds of puppy survival with these six tips.

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You paid a fortune for all those health clearances, gulped at the stud fee, agonized about the breeding, and held your breath during the pregnancy. Now she's finally in labor, and all's going well. Almost. You remind yourself that 30 percent of all puppies die before reaching weaning age. Uh uh. Nope. Not your puppies. Not after all that.

And you're right. You don't need to accept that statistic. You can't always save them all, but you can sure beat the numbers if you know what to look for, what to do, and what not to do wrong.

Remember:

1. Mother doesn't always know best. Most dams are natural mothers, but some can chew umbilical cords too far down, and some even devour their own puppies. Don't let a dam deliver puppies without supervision. And if a dam won't nurse, don't blame her; look for problems, such as mastitis, which would make nursing excruciatingly painful.
2. Puppies don't need to be baked. Placing a heat lamp over the whelping box or a heating pad beneath the puppies seems like a nice gesture to keep them warm, but too much heat can dehydrate a puppy. If the puppy's skin is red, it's probably overheated. Supplying a heat source is good, but make sure the puppies can crawl away from it.
3. Chilled puppies don't need to be fed. It's the natural hot-chicken-soup human reaction: get some warm formula into a chilled baby. But it can be deadly for a chilled puppy. A chilled puppy has slowed or stopped peristaltic gut action, which means the food sits in the puppy's stomach without moving onto its small intestine. The food can sour and the pup can vomit, increasing its risk of aspiration pneumonia.
4. Chilled puppies don't need to be cooked. It's also natural to want to heat up a chilled puppy as fast as you can. Unfortunately, extremely hot air from a heat source will make the puppy's surface blood vessels dilate. This is how the body wicks heat away from its core. But your goal is to heat the core, not the skin. Instead, warm the puppy gradually. Holding the pup against your skin and under your shirt is a good way to warm it.
5. Weak puppies don't need to let nature take its course. Some breeders don't try to save weak puppies because they feel they are perpetuating weak genes. But puppies that fail to thrive are not necessarily genetically inferior. Often a puppy is born smaller simply because its placenta was not positioned advantageously, or it's born not breathing because its placenta tore away from its body too long before birth, or its dam rejects it because it had the misfortune to become chilled and so doesn't feel or act like a normal newborn. These puppies should, and often can, be saved.
6. Thirty percent of puppies don't need to die anyway. But that's without your help! You may not save them all, but you'll know that you tried.

### Top 10 Sick Puppy Signs

1. Chilled; rectal temperature less than 95 degrees F
2. Lack of sucking reflex; he should suck if you put your finger in his mouth
3. Lack of muscle tone; dangling limbs
4. Gasping for breath, or audible breathing
5. Dehydrated; skin remains tented when pulled up
6. Incessant crying; crying for more than 15 minutes
7. Off by itself; separated from the dam and littermates
8. Perfectly still; a normal puppy twitches and jerks
9. Inflamed or smelly umbilical stub; may be infected
10. Caked fecal matter on rectum; may have diarrhea