

Feline Foster Care Guide



This guide to caring for cats and kittens has been excerpted from the ASPCA's Los Angeles Foster Care Program.

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Overview: Is Fostering Right for You?



There are many things to consider when deciding to foster an animal. Foster caregivers must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Complete a foster care application and sign a foster care agreement
- Sign up as an “on-deck” foster, ready to pick up your cat or kitten within a 36-hour timeframe
- Be able to set aside time every two weeks to bring your foster animal in for follow-up vaccinations and spay/neuter surgery
- Take on the responsibility for routine care in your home during the foster period
- Ensure that animals can be fostered in your home
- Isolate foster animals from family pets within the home, as required

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- Quarantine your foster animals for 14 days to prevent disease spread, as required
 - Kitten-proof your home to reduce potential safety hazards
 - Maintain a peaceful, loving environment for the foster animals and spend quality time socializing them
 - Utilize the hotline for all emergency and non-emergency treatment of foster animals
 - Maintain communication with the volunteer director
 - Commit to the entire foster period with the animal
 - Try to spend a minimum of two hours per day with kittens to socialize them and monitor their health (time commitments will vary depending on your foster animals)

In addition:

- Existing animals in your home must be up-to-date on vaccines and in good health
- Every family member in the household will need to be prepared for the commitment and emotions involved with fostering



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Preparing Your Home and Family

NOTE: Foster kittens and cats must remain indoors only!

Do not let your foster felines outdoors under any circumstances, including in shared hallways, and keep them separated from any resident animals in a confined space such as a roomy crate or in a spare room such as an extra bathroom.

What You Should Do

- Remove small, ingestible objects from the environment; this may include small toys or parts of toys, elastic bands, paper clips, string, sewing pins and needles, ornaments, tinsel and more
- Keep toilet bowls closed, especially when small kittens are in the home
- Secure window screens in any open windows no matter how small the opening
- Ensure that side panels on window AC units are securely in place and cannot be moved or opened
- Secure loose electrical wires, cords for window blinds and other potential hazards
- Remove plants and flowers from the vicinity of your foster animal's space; many types of decorative vegetation are highly toxic to animals
- Do not offer any human food to your foster animal
- Keep your home reasonably climate-controlled (if it's too hot for you, it's likely too hot for your foster)
- Ensure visitors do not leave doors or windows open, and are conscientious about safety measures that are in place for your foster
- Discard old or uneaten animal food and keep fresh water available at all times
- Secure/remove household toxins such as cleaning agents, pesticides and solvents



What You Will Need

Some of this will be provided for you, so check with your volunteer director

- Litter box and non-clumping litter
- Large dog crate (if applicable)
- Carrier (with door removed after transport for hiding spot in crate or room)
- Wet and dry life-stage appropriate food
- Formula, syringe and bottle for youngest kittens
- Heating source for youngest kittens*
- Scale for youngest kittens
- Scratchpads and other toys (choose easy to disinfect toys or those that can be disposed of after being used by this particular foster cat; carpeted or wooden scratching posts should not be used)
- Bedding (towels, blankets, cat beds) that is washable and kept clean and dry at all times
- Food and water bowls
- Treats
- Bleach for disinfecting

* Kittens under five weeks of age may still need an additional heating source since they cannot regulate their body temperature. If this is the case, you will be provided with a heating source to use in your kitten's crate. It is very important to make sure that the kitten has an area of the crate with no additional heating where she can go if she becomes too hot.

A towel or blanket should be placed over the heat source. You may also want to cover the crate with a towel or sheet to keep the home draft-free and cozy. The kitten's home should be in a warm, quiet room and if possible, room temperature should be around 80-85 F.

[Find an orphaned kitten temperature chart on the Maddie's Fund website.](#)

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Getting Acquainted

Being in a new environment is stressful for most cats, and a normal reaction may be to hide.

Allow your foster cat time to adjust to your home while being housed in a “safe haven” such as a roomy crate or a separate room. A spare bathroom is ideal since there aren’t hiding spaces and it is easy to disinfect.

Block off small areas where the cat may try to hide and get stuck. Confinement is not harmful or cruel to your cat in any way as long as there is sufficient space for him to stand up, turn around, lie down fully stretched out and rest in an area away from the litter box and food and water bowls.



Scared cats have been known to hurt themselves by wedging themselves inside air-conditioners, heaters, and radiators; behind ovens or inside ceiling tiles—or by dashing out the front door in fear. It is much safer to keep a frightened new cat safely in one cat-proofed room. Open up your cat carrier and let the cat decide whether she wants to explore or wants to remain in the carrier. Many times a cat will remain in her carrier for hours.

Never try to pull your new foster cat out of hiding. Instead, use toys or treats to encourage her to come out. If your foster cat still won’t come out, let her be. Cats need time to adjust to their new environment.



Let your foster cat get used to you slowly. Sit in the room and bring treats with you. Read a newspaper or a book out loud while you’re sitting there so the cat gets to know your voice. Offer treats to your foster cat in moderation.

When your cat is eating, drinking, using the litter box and moving around the room in a relaxed manner, he may be ready to explore more of the house (after the initial quarantine period). However, if your cat runs when you enter the room, hides, only eats or uses the litter box at night, slinks around the room with his body low to the ground, hisses, growls or cowers, these are signs of fear and mean he's not ready to come out of confinement yet. Keep your cat confined and contact the volunteer director if there is no progress after one week.

Some cats may need less than a day to adjust; others may need days or weeks to become comfortable enough to explore the entire house without fear. This is normal cat behavior.

Introducing Fosters to Resident Pets

If you want to introduce your foster to your resident pets after the 14-day minimum quarantine, recommendations from the volunteer director can be provided on how to do so safely. Cats or kittens should not be introduced to resident pets unless they are free of signs of disease.



NOTE: Isolate the foster from resident pets and call the hotline for assistance if your foster cat develops any of the following:

- Lethargy
- Weakness
- Upper respiratory infection
(sneezing, watery/red eyes, coughing)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Visible parasites
(e.g. fleas or worms)

Medical Appointments

The timing and location of exams, boosters and spay/neuter surgery will be provided to you by the volunteer director.

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Kitten Growth Milestones

Kitten Growth Milestones *Courtesy of University of WI Shelter Medicine Program*

Age	Weight	Milestones
Birth	2 – 4 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eyes and ears are closed• Sleeps 90% of the time• Minimal handling
2 – 3 days		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Umbilical cord falls off
4 days		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begins to purr
10 – 14 days	8 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eyes and ears should be open• Healthy kittens will be round and warm with pink skin and will rarely cry
2 – 3 weeks	12 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baby incisors erupt, can begin to eliminate without help• Will start crawling, standing and playing with littermates• Begin regular handling• Ready for deworming
4 weeks	1 pound	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baby canine teeth erupt, beginning to walk but do not have great balance, will begin to groom themselves, able to thermoregulate• Continue daily handling• Ready for first vaccine• Ready for gruel and may be ready for introduction of dry kitten food
6 weeks	1.5 pounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baby premolars erupt• Running, playing, using the litter box, grooming themselves• Should be eating dry kitten food, supplemented with canned
8 weeks	2 pounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ready for surgery and adoption!

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Daily Care for Moms with Kittens

Most mothers, even first-timers, can take care of themselves and their offspring quite well. For the most part, you will leave mom and babies alone while observing for any signs of trouble.

Provide a nesting box for nursing mothers so babies can't get out but mom can when she needs some peace and quiet. Only half of the nesting box should have extra warmth added.



Young Kitten Care

A kitten's survival depends on getting consistent nutrition and warmth. The mother's colostrum, which is the first milk produced, is vitally important to a newborn's cardiovascular system and defense against disease. Colostrum is rich in antibodies to help protect against various infections, but kittens can only absorb these antibodies and benefit from them for a short period after birth.

It is very important that newborns nurse as soon as possible after birth. If they do not find a nipple on their own, put their mouth close to one and hold them until they nurse.

Continued healthy nursing behavior is crucial for kitten survival. In order to tell if the kittens are nursing, put on exam gloves and gently pick up each kitten and feel for a round belly full of milk. A flat or concave belly indicates that the kitten may not be nursing. You should perform this check once or twice a day.

Also, visually confirm that each kitten is actually latching onto mom. A gram scale works great to log each kitten's weight on your health monitoring sheet (found later in this guide). Healthy kittens should gain a little weight each day.

Problem Signs

During the first two weeks, kittens should spend approximately 90% of the time eating and sleeping. If kittens are crying during or after eating, they are usually becoming ill or are not getting adequate milk. A newborn kitten is very susceptible to infections and can die within 24 hours. If excessive crying occurs, the mother and entire litter should be examined by a veterinarian, so please call us immediately.

Supplemental Feeding for Nursing Kittens with Mom

When adequate nursing isn't possible, supplemental feeding one to three times per day may be recommended, especially for any litter with more than five kittens. We will supply you with liquid or powdered Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR) for supplemental feeding.

The temperature of the milk replacer can be tested on your forearm and should be about the same as one's skin. The KMR can give directions concerning feeding amounts.



NOTE: Do not hold kittens on their backs like human babies or squeeze the bottle while feeding—this can cause kittens to aspirate the milk, choke and/or catch pneumonia.

If the kittens are still nursing from their mother, the amounts recommended will be excessive. Generally, one-third to half of the listed amount should be the daily goal. Supplemental feeding may be continued until the kittens are old enough to eat kitten food.

If the mother does not produce milk or her milk becomes infected, the kittens will cry excessively. If this occurs, the entire litter could die within 24 to 48 hours. Total replacement feeding, using the KMR, or adopting the kittens to another nursing mother, is usually necessary.

If replacement feeding is elected, the amounts of milk listed on the KMR container should be fed. Kittens less than two weeks of age should be fed every 3 to 4 hours. Kittens 2 to 4 weeks old do well with feedings every 4 to 6 hours. Don't feel like you have to wake them up to feed—if they're full enough to sleep peacefully, let them rest until they wake up hungry.

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Daily Care for Orphaned Kittens

Please note that young kittens are extremely fragile, and some may die no matter how well you take care of them (sometimes 1 out of 4 in the first week alone). Remain attentive to your foster kittens and provide them with the best possible care; as difficult as it is to lose a foster pet, you should not blame yourself. In the unfortunate event that your foster kitten passes away, contact the volunteer director as soon as possible.

Daily Care for Newborns Using a Bottle (0-3 weeks old)

Young kittens need to be fed every 2-4 hours throughout the day and night. Sometimes bottle feeding can be challenging, and if your kitten will not take the milk replacer from the bottle you may wait until the next feeding to try again. However, if your kitten has not eaten in two consecutive feedings, please contact us right away.



Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR) formula will be provided for all kittens requiring bottle feeding. Please follow the directions provided with the KMR to mix the formula (one part formula to two parts water). For the first couple of feedings, you may increase the amount of water slightly to dilute the formula and help reduce digestive upset.

Mixed formula that has not been warmed can be saved in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours. The unmixed

powder formula should also be kept in the refrigerator after being opened and be kept for up to 3 months.

Prepare only the amount of formula your litter of kittens will need for each feeding. Kittens will usually need about 4mL per 100g of body weight per feeding, or about 30mL over a 24-hour period.

Formula should be warmed by placing the bottle of cold KMR upright in a mug of hot water. Check the temperature of the formula on the inside of your wrist before feeding each kitten. The temperature should be warm to the touch but not hot.

Safe Feeding

You should also test the nipple on your bottle and make sure the formula drips out slowly. It is very easy for kittens to aspirate (inhale fluids into the lungs). If formula comes out of the kitten's nose, stop feeding immediately.

Do not feed any more until the kitten has completely cleared the fluid from its lungs, usually by sneezing. If crackling or popping is heard as the kitten breathes, or if you suspect your kitten may have aspirated formula, contact us immediately.



Kittens should be warm before feeding to digest food properly. Prepare kittens for feeding by placing them on their stomachs or wrapping them in a small towel like a taco if they are fussy. [\(See how-to resource at the end of this guide.\)](#)

If wrapped in a towel, make sure the kitten can still knead with her forelegs outside of the towel and that she is not on her back, which can cause aspiration. When placed on her stomach, make sure she is in an upright position with her head tilted slightly up and neck extended (as if she was nursing from

mom).

Support the lower body with the palm of your hand and hold the head steady with your thumb and forefinger. Never force milk down by squeezing the bottle since this can cause aspiration. Bottle feeding takes practice and patience to master.

Make sure you do not overfeed the kitten by checking her tummy for fullness while feeding. After bottle feeding, gently burp the kitten by placing her on her stomach in the palm of one hand and patting her on the back a few times with the other hand.

This will allow any air ingested to be expelled, however, you won't hear the kitten "burp".

Clean out your bottle with soap and water between feedings.

After the kitten has finished feeding, you must now stimulate the kitten to urinate and defecate. Kittens should defecate at least once a day and should urinate every time.

Elimination

If you are fostering orphaned kittens, or mom is unable to care for her babies, it is necessary to stimulate kittens less than 3 weeks of age to urinate and defecate. The voiding reflex is normally initiated by the mother licking the kitten's ano-genital region.

The foster caregiver must therefore imitate this by gently massaging the kitten's ano-genital area with a warm damp cloth or cotton ball. This should be done after each feeding, and each kitten should pass urine and have a bowel movement at least once a day.

Daily Care for Kittens Transitioning to Wet Food (3-5 weeks)



Transitioning kittens should be fed “gruel,” which is a pudding-like consistency mix of KMR or water and wet kitten food. They should be fed every 4-6 hours and supplemental bottle feeding may be necessary if they are not taking to the canned food. You are welcome to experiment with different consistencies but the gruel should be gradually thickened to get them ready for solid food. Leftover gruel should be discarded immediately if not eaten. Canned food that has not been made into gruel yet can be covered and refrigerated for up to 48 hours.

Once kittens have teeth, they could start to chew the nipple on a bottle, which can be very dangerous due to small pieces being ingested. This must be monitored closely.

Fresh water should be provided at all times for transitioning kittens.

To encourage a kitten to eat the gruel, place a small amount on your finger and place it on the kitten's tongue or lips. The goal is that she will eat on her own from a plate or bowl. This transition period can take days to weeks.

At this age, stimulating should no longer be necessary and she will begin urinating and defecating on her own. Continue until you notice urine and feces in the housing area.



Small litter boxes should be provided at this stage with non-clumping litter. Kittens will eventually learn how to use a litter box on their own but accidents are common for the first few weeks. If they defecate outside, move the feces to the litter box. You can also place kittens inside their litter box after meals.

Daily Care for Kittens Eating on their Own (5-8+ weeks)

Kittens who are eating completely on their own will need to be fed wet food about three times throughout the day. They should always have dry food and water available.

Don't forget to clean their litter box at least once day (and focus on and enjoy this socialization period!).



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Grooming, Bathing, Socializing

Grooming & Bathing

Kittens should be kept clean and will often need bathing since they are so messy. Less is more for bathing kittens.

Try to spot clean by only rinsing the kitten with warm water where he is dirty, such as his bottom. Make sure to not get a lot of water on his head, especially the eyes, nose and ears. If there is food stuck on his face, use a warm damp cloth.

Kittens cannot be put back into their home until they are completely dry. You can use a blow dryer on the lowest setting after towel drying.

Socializing Your Foster Kitten

Socialization is critical for young kittens, and they will need multiple short socialization sessions on a daily basis, as well as playtime and enrichment to help them learn to enjoy being around people.

Please follow these steps for socializing foster kittens:

- Keep the kittens confined to a dog crate in a quiet room for the first few days to make sure they are eating well & adjusting to the new environment. Offer them their carrier without its door or a cardboard box inside the crate and cover the crate with a sheet so they feel more secure.
- The crate should be in a secure, cat-proof room where kittens cannot run away and hide once you start letting them out of the crate.
- Once they are eating well and comfortable, and after the initial 14-day quarantine, allow them to explore this cat-proofed area when supervised; keep them confined when not supervised.
- Make sure to use every meal time as a socialization event. Offer kittens food and sit with them while they eat. Eventually work toward putting the food on your finger and having them eat it from there. Once they are comfortable with this, slowly bring the food closer to you so that they have to climb on your lap to get the food. Progress to petting them while they eat, starting with their face and shoulders. Eventually work on handling more and more and then finally, picking up. ([See how-to resource at the end of this guide.](#))



- Short socialization sessions (3-5 minutes) several times a day are better than one or two long sessions.
- Once the kittens become social with you, have friends or family interact with them too, so that they learn to be social with everyone
- Work on getting them used to household noises and voices by slowly introducing them (i.e. talking in a normal voice, laughing, opening cabinets, etc.)
- Always pair food or playtime with your presence, whether or not you are touching/interacting with them.
- Give them safe objects to explore, such as paper bags and cardboard boxes.
- Do not allow them to play with your hands or feet. This will encourage play biting which will continue and be painful once they get older.
- Allow them to walk on different surfaces and explore when supervised.



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Cleaning & Sanitizing During and After Foster Stays

The most common disease organisms seen in foster animals are viruses, bacteria, parasites and fungi. It is very important to repeatedly and thoroughly clean and disinfect any areas of your home where your foster pets are—and any objects foster pets contact.

Daily and weekly cleanings will help keep your foster kittens and any other animals happy and healthy. A more thorough sanitation will be needed between each new foster pet that comes to your home.

Routine practices to control disease transmission include:

- Setting up an isolation area for foster animals
- Practicing good hand hygiene before and after handling animals or objects in the isolation area
- Cleaning and disinfecting items in the isolation area using the appropriate products

The Quarantine/Isolation Area

Your area should include the following components:

- Isolation from other pets in home
- Pet-proof
- Surfaces that are easy to clean and disinfect (vinyl or tile floor, not carpet)
- Stocked with supplies that are dedicated to the area and easy to sanitize
- A good, ideally separate, source of ventilation
- Low human traffic

Some foster parents will also prefer to wear a smock or other protective wear to avoid direct contact with their clothing that comes in contact with other animals.

Hand Hygiene

Hand washing is critical—it is the most important way of reducing transmission of disease between animals. Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling animals or items in the animals' environment.

Thorough hand washing procedure:

- Wet hands with warm (not hot) water
- Apply liquid or foam soap (1-2 pumps)
- Vigorously lather for a minimum of 15 seconds
- Rinse thoroughly
- Pat hands dry

Cleaning and Disinfecting Products

Soaps and detergents are not the same as disinfectants. It's important to understand how these two groups of products work and to use them appropriately.

- Soaps and detergents are cleaning agents that work by suspending dirt and grease and breaking up organic matter. Soaps do not necessarily kill germs. Dish and laundry soaps are common examples of detergents.
- Disinfectants are chemical solutions that kill germs. The particular germs killed depend on the ingredients in the disinfectant. While some disinfectants serve a dual purpose and have some cleansing properties, many disinfectants do not effectively remove dirt and grease. In general, disinfectants must be applied to already cleaned surfaces and allowed to remain in contact with the surface for a minimum period of time in order to be effective.

Choosing Detergents and Disinfectants for the Home

When making the choice of a particular product for your foster home, it is necessary to understand the active ingredients, strength, required contact time, effect against typical shelter diseases and any potential side effects.

You also will want to check on the product's availability, since there are many products but (with the exception of standard household bleach) very few can be bought at the grocery store, are safe for felines and effective against common diseases.

For this reason, we recommend using a basic dish soap and water wash followed by thorough rinsing and then disinfecting with diluted bleach.

Using Bleach as a Disinfectant

The recommended dilution of standard non-color safe 5.25% household bleach for most agents of disease is 1 part bleach to 32 parts water (1/2 cup bleach to 1 gallon water). Bleach needs to be mixed fresh daily. The recommended contact time is 10 minutes. Bleach is then rinsed off and the surface allowed to dry.

Do Not Use

Phenol-based products are known to be toxic to cats and should not be used. If unsure about a product, a good rule of thumb is to avoid if the name contains "sol".

Typical Sanitation Procedure for the Home

All surfaces may not be easily cleaned and disinfected in the typical foster environment, but thorough and repeated washing and vacuuming helps in decreasing the number of germs in the environment.

Surface/Object	Suggested Procedure	Special Step
All surfaces and objects	Thorough cleaning and disinfection between each animal's stay in your home	Thoroughly clean surfaces with a soap or detergent, and then apply bleach (for any surfaces that can be bleached). Bleach mixture should be ½ cup bleach per gallon of warm water. This can be added to a spray bottle but it needs to be made fresh each day. Let sit 10 minutes, then rinse thoroughly and dry. If using bleach, be sure to let the item or area air out thoroughly before placing animals into the area again.
High contact surfaces (counters, light switches and floors)	Daily cleaning with a detergent and weekly disinfection with a product like bleach solution	Vacuum all rugs and furniture vigorously and frequently!
Visibly soiled objects/surfaces	Cleaning with a detergent and disinfection with a product like bleach solution.	
Litter boxes and food bowls	Daily cleaning and weekly disinfection with a product like bleach solution.	Sanitize food bowls separately from litter boxes
All regular surfaces (any surface your foster animal comes in contact with like walls, blinds, etc.)	Weekly cleaning and disinfection with product like bleach solution	Increase frequency to daily or more when infection is present
Laundry (bedding, blankets and some toys)	Remove organic material before laundering Use detergent and bleach Thoroughly machine dry on high heat.	Take caution in moving soiled items to washing machine to prevent environmental contamination Throw away heavily soiled items

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Medical Information & Concerns

Below are guidelines but please call the medical hotline for any concerns you have.

Call the Hotline Immediately in These Situations

- Difficulty breathing, erratic breathing pattern, gasping for air
- Very high or low body temperature
- Very pale, blue, or grey gums
- Not eating or drinking
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Sneezing or coughing
- Seizures or neurologic symptoms
- Accidental injury or trauma, including but not limited to cuts and fractures
- Unable to stand or walk
- Failure to eat or drink
- Signs of lethargy or uncharacteristic/abnormal behavior
- Straining to urinate or not urinating for more than 24 hours
- Failure to defecate for more than 2 days
- Difficulty giving birth

If you observe any of the symptoms listed below, call the medical hotline for next steps and to coordinate a veterinary clinic visit if necessary.

Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)

Viral and bacterial respiratory infections are very common in cats, especially young or stressed ones. Symptoms include clear to colored discharge from eyes and/or nose, loss of appetite, depression, congestion, sneezing, coughing, fever, etc.

Wash your hands thoroughly after handling an animal with visible URI symptoms and before contact with any other cats as URI is extremely contagious. URI is similar to a human cold, but is generally not transmittable to people or other animal species except for cats. Any cat showing signs of an upper respiratory infection should be isolated from other cats in the household.

Conjunctivitis

Symptoms include clear or colored eye discharge, painful eyes, eyes that are crusted shut or swollen. Ocular antibiotics and ointments are often required. Some viral upper respiratory infections can cause corneal ulcers, which are emergencies. A painful eye should always be examined by a vet. Many causes of conjunctivitis are contagious to other cats.



Kitten Hypoglycemia

Young kittens are very susceptible to hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and regular feeding (either by bottle or by nursing if mom is present) is vital to prevent this from happening. Most instances of hypoglycemia in the kitten are the result of inadequate nutrition; either not enough or poor quality (indigestible) food.

Excessive exercise may also cause the body to use up more sugar than is available. Some illnesses can also cause episodes of hypoglycemia. The typical symptoms of hypoglycemia include lack of energy and listlessness, weakness, wobbliness and even seizures.

If untreated, kittens are susceptible to coma, severe neurological damage, and even death. If you suspect your kitten may be hypoglycemic, offer a small amount of food and call the medical hotline immediately for further instructions.

Limping

Limping can be caused by physical injury or may be the result of a fever. Place a limping kitten in a carrier for 30 minutes to rest. If the kitten continues to limp after that time, even if it is sporadic, call the medical hotline for further instruction

Vomiting

Vomiting is not normal. It can be a symptom of many different medical issues.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea can be caused by a number of things (e.g. diet, stress or parasites) and can rapidly debilitate small kittens. Panleukopenia (also known as feline distemper) is a highly contagious and potentially fatal viral disease in cats and kittens that can also cause diarrhea. [\(See resource for complete panleukopenia information at the end of this guide.\)](#)

Internal Parasites

Foster animals are routinely treated for some internal parasites, but there are many potential parasites that may be present, and sometimes repeated treatments are required. Common parasites include but are not limited to Coccidia, Giardia, roundworms, tapeworms and hookworms.

If parasites are observed or suspected, a fresh fecal sample may be requested for evaluation at a veterinary clinic. Signs of parasites may include a large, hard belly, diarrhea, worms in vomit or the stool, tapeworm segments (similar in appearance to grains of rice) around the anus, a scruffy looking coat, and/or an inability to gain weight. Some parasites are contagious to other animals through direct or indirect contact with infected feces. Most of these parasites require medication.

Ringworm

Ringworm is a very contagious fungus that is transmittable to other species as well as people. The fungal spores can live in the environment for a long time.

Signs of ringworm can vary but typically include irregularly shaped areas of fur loss and the skin in these areas will usually have a crusty appearance. Any cat or kitten showing signs that may be the result of ringworm must be isolated from other animals in the household.

Fleas

Fleas feed on the blood of cats, dogs, humans and other animals and can transmit disease. Signs include intense itching and scratching and fur loss, particularly along the back and at base of tail.

Earmites

Earmites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. They can cause itching, scratching, head-shaking and dark brown discharge in the ears that often looks like dirt or coffee grounds. They are contagious to other cats and dogs, but usually require direct contact with the infected animal to be spread.

Panleukopenia

Panleukopenia is a viral infection that most commonly affects kittens, young cats and unvaccinated felines. Panleukopenia has a very high mortality rate, even with treatment.

Unfortunately, this illness can be frustrating to deal with because the virus can survive in the environment for years. This means that other unvaccinated cats/kittens can become infected with panleukopenia simply by coming into contact with places where an infected cat has been. Symptoms include fever, diarrhea, lethargy, vomiting, loss of appetite and even sudden death.

The virus is highly contagious to other cats, especially through contact with infected feces or vomit but also contact with contaminated objects such as bowls, hands, clothes, etc. [\(See complete panleukopenia resources at the end of this guide.\)](#)



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Print-and-Post Resources for Foster Homes

Top Tips for Foster Caregivers

The five fundamental needs of kittens that need to be met by a foster caregiver:

- » Keep kittens warm
- » Provide kittens with adequate nutrition
- » Keep kittens clean
- » Provide socialization
- » Do your best to protect them from infectious disease

Kitten-proof your home:

- » Keep medications, cleaners, electrical cords, electrical outlets, and house plants out of reach from your foster pets
- » Block access to any small hiding places such as under beds or behind cabinets



Top Tips for Foster Caregivers *(continued)*

- The general rule is to have 1 food bowl, 1 water bowl and 1 litter box for every 2 kittens.
- Always make sure your kittens are dry! Wet kittens can rapidly lose body temperature.
- Young kittens may try to suckle on each other. If this becomes problematic the kittens must be separated to prevent larger medical concerns
- Remember to thoroughly wash your hands after being in contact with your foster animal, especially between handling resident animals and foster animals.
- Track your foster pet's progress on the health monitoring sheet found later in this booklet.
- Appetite and energy are the two most important things to keep watch on. A lack of interest in food or a drop in energy can indicate a serious medical issue, even if no other symptoms are present.
- Daily weight gain is crucial for growing kittens. Weigh kittens at the same time daily to ensure adequate weight gain. Kittens should gain about ½ ounce per day or 4 ounces per week.
- If your cat seems sick, check immediately for dehydration by pulling the skin up just a little lower than the back of the neck. It should be taut and snap back down. If it stands up or takes some time to go back down, the cat may be dehydrated. Please contact the medical hotline for further instructions.
- Do not take your foster animal to your own veterinarian. If the animal requires any veterinary care, contact our medical hotline. We are unable to reimburse volunteers for veterinary care that is not coordinated through our medical hotline or volunteer director.

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