

Kitten Foster Program Manual

Revised June 2024



Ventura County Animal Services

600 Aviation Dr.

Camarillo, CA 93010

***For additional resource, scheduling, and an electronic copy of this manual please visit:

[VCAS.US/Foster-resources](https://vcas.us/foster-resources)



Important Resources

VCAS.us/foster-resources: For Scheduling Appointments, and other Resources

VCAS Foster Families Facebook Page: A community page for our foster families

*****The #1 thing to remember when fostering kittens is: WEIGH, WEIGH, WEIGH!! The overwhelming majority of kittens who pass away in foster care do so because they were not weighed as frequently as they should have been!*****

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET YOUR KITTENS HOME:

- Get your kittens settled into their habitat. If they are younger than 3 weeks old, or are small for their age, make sure they have a heat source!
- Be sure to kitten-proof their area and watch out for any common household hazards.
- Feed and care for your kittens as instructed, referring back to the Feeding/Care Guide.
- Record their weights and make notes about their progress. If kittens fail to gain weight, or begin to lose weight, they need to be seen by the Vet's Office.
- Spend time daily playing with your kittens and socializing them, if they're old enough!
- Give kittens plenty of time to rest. They will sleep much of the day—this is normal.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?:

GENERAL CONTACT INFORMATION

- **Foster Care Coordinator Cell: (805) 336-5277 - Call 8:00am-6:00pm for any urgent matter. You may text for non-urgent matters.**
- **Foster Care Coordinator Email: vcar.foster@ventura.org**
- **Foster Mentors:**
 - Roxanne Kight**
email: roxkight@gmail.com
Phone/text: 805-233-4838
 - Sally Ponce-O'Rourke**
email: bfwuhan@verizon.net
Phone/text: 805-844-4994
 - Kim Schmeichel**
email: kschmike@aol.com
Phone/text: 805-276-7365
- **Shelter Main Line: (805) 388-4341 - Call this line if you have an emergency after hours, or during regular hours and cannot reach the Foster Care Coordinator Cell. After hours emergency- Call this line and press '4'.**

NON-URGENT MEDICAL: If your kittens start to show any signs of mild-moderate illness – sneezing, mild-moderate diarrhea, not eating, runny nose, goopy eyes, hair loss, moderate weight loss (10 grams or less), fleas, etc – Schedule an appointment with our vets office. This can be done through the foster resources webpage at vcas.us/foster-resources under the scheduling section

FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES:

- 8:00am-6:00pm any day: Call the foster care coordinator at 805-336-5277. If you cannot reach the foster care coordinator, please call 805-388-4341 ask to speak to the vet's office
 - Afterhours: Call the shelter 805-388-4341, select 4 for an injured animal

Please contact the foster care coordinator or shelter main line during working hours (or at 8am the following morning if after hours) if you observe any of the following: Head slumped/ body limp/ unable to rouse (Fading Kitten Syndrome), diarrhea that is very liquidy, white, bloody, or black, any rapid weight loss, mouth breathing, heavy/labored breathing, red/brown urine, vomiting and diarrhea together or within a short timeframe, seizures. Any injuries sustained while in foster care also warrant a call to the foster coordinator.

**** Only call the afterhours emergency line if the kitten is suffering from Fading Kitten Syndrome and you have been unable to rouse the kitten after attempting the Fading Kitten Protocol (pg.16) or if the kitten appears to be gravely suffering. We are only able to provide humane euthanasia services afterhours.*****

WELLNESS / VACCINES:

Kittens need to have regular wellness check-ups at the shelter with our Foster Recheck Team. These check-ups are performed in the Kitty Cottage and not in the Vets Office. Appointments can be made online through the Foster Resources Page (<https://www.vcas.us/foster-resources/>). Appointments are needed every 2 weeks from the time you get your kittens home until they are ready for their spay/neuter surgery, which is typically around the ages of 6 - 8 weeks. If you have a queen with kittens, the kittens need to be scheduled for their first wellness appointment at 2 weeks of age. Bring the mamma cat with you, as she will receive a dose of deworming medicine.

Important to note: Wellness checks need to be scheduled even if your kittens are under the care of the Vet's Office. The Vet's Office relies on the Foster Recheck Team to take care of the routine deworming, defleaing and vaccinations for all foster kittens. The vets office does not perform these routine exams, so make sure you keep your kittens on their every 2-week schedule for the Wellness Exams even if they are being seen by the Vet's Office for other matters.

SCHEDULING FOR SURGERY:

Kittens must be generally healthy and weigh over 1.5lbs. If the kittens are scheduled for surgery, but weigh less than 1.5 lbs (1 pound, 8 ounces), the Vet's Office will not perform the surgery and will call the foster to come pick them up. When they reach or are very close to their surgery weights, you will need to send an email to the Foster Coordinator (vcar.foster@ventura.org) requesting a surgery date. Include in the email the kitten's A#, male or female, if the kitten is pre-adopted or will be going to a Pet Store for adoption. If they will be going to a store, you have the option of picking your kittens up the afternoon of the surgery (approximately 4:30 pm) and take them home to allow them to recover 2 days before going to the Pet Store. You will coordinate with a Store Angel for store placement and then transport the kitten as arranged. Another option is you can have them recover at the shelter and the shelter will transport the kitten to the store for you. You will need to bring your foster's kennel card or medical history with you to each appointment. On the day of surgery, you will drop your kittens off at the shelter at 7:30 in the morning. You need to feed your kittens breakfast before you drop them off. If you are bringing a queen for surgery, do not feed her.

MARKETING / GETTING YOUR KITTENS ADOPTED:

At five to six weeks old you will need to send recent photos of your kittens along with a short bio explaining the kitten's personality to the Foster Coordinator. If you will not be sending your kittens to a Pet Store, it is your responsibility, as their foster, to market your kittens and to answer emails from potential adopters in a timely manner! Ask the Foster Coordinator to make your kittens available on the website. You will then begin receiving emails directly to your personal email address from interested parties. You will be able to select adopters and process adoptions yourself. Instructions for processing adoptions and pre-adoptions are located on the foster resources webpage.

OFFSITE PET STORES & STORE ANGELS

If you would like to forego the process of finding adopters for your kittens you can transfer them to one of our Petco and PetSmart locations where they can be made available for adoption. To do this you will need to contact one of our Store Angel volunteers. You can do this by simply putting up a post on the VCAS Foster Families Facebook page stating the number of kittens you have and when they will be ready to be transferred to a pet store. As long as kittens are healthy and 8 weeks of age, they can be placed either 24 or 48 hours after their spay/neuter surgery (48 for PetSmart stores and 24 for Petco stores). The store volunteer will give you instructions on when to bring your kittens in. Please **DO NOT** bring kittens to a store without first arranging the drop off with a store volunteer. **After you have dropped off your kittens you will need to notify the foster coordinator by email at vcar.foster@ventura.org within 24 hours of drop off. The email should include the A# of the kitten and the pet store name and location (PetSmart Oxnard, Petco Camarillo, etc.).**

WHAT IF I CAN'T CONTINUE TO FOSTER MY KITTENS

We expect our fosters to make a commitment to keeping their foster kittens until they have reached an adoptable age and weight. This is imperative to the lifesaving mission of our foster program. If you are habitually unable to satisfy your commitment to your foster kittens you may be asked to leave the foster program. The timeframe you keep your fosters can range from one to eight weeks depending on the age and health of your kittens. If your kittens get sick, it is expected that you continue to care for them. We will teach you how to administer medication, etc. If something unexpected comes up and you are unable to continue caring for your kittens you are required to attempt to find another foster for them. You can do this by posting a foster plea on the VCAS Foster Families Facebook page. The plea should include ages, health status, eating requirements, and personality information (hissy, friendly, scarred, etc.). Once another foster is found you must contact the foster coordinator with the Animals ID #'s of the kittens and information regarding the transfer of foster homes. Of course, we understand that unexpected emergencies happen. If you have tried to reach out to other fosters unsuccessfully or have an immediate emergency you can bring you kittens back to the shelter. Please DO NOT bring them to the shelter unannounced. You are required to contact the foster coordinator by phone to notify the us that you can no longer keep your kittens and a time will be scheduled for you to drop them off.

KITTEN MILESTONES:

2 weeks old

- Due for wellness check-up
 - kittens will receive oral deworming meds

4 weeks old

- Due for wellness check-up -
 - kittens will receive oral deworming meds
 - healthy kittens weighing at least 1 pound may receive the FVRCP vaccination
 - healthy kittens weighing at least 1 pound may receive topical flea treatment

- Kittens should be ready to start weaning onto gruel

5 weeks old

- Photos and bios due
- Available for pre-adoption on our website

6 weeks old

- Due for wellness check-up
 - kittens will receive oral deworming meds
 - healthy kittens weighing at least 1 pound may receive their first FVRCP vaccination
 - healthy kittens weighing at least 1 pound may receive topical flea treatment

- kittens who will be placed in a Pet Store after surgery will receive an injection for tape worm treatment

Possibly ready for spay/neuter to be scheduled if they are very close to or over 1.5lbs

Kittens should be eating independently

8 weeks old

Time to schedule spay/neuter surgery if you have not already done so.

Due for wellness check-up -

- kittens will receive oral deworming meds
- healthy kittens weighing at least 1 pound may receive their 2nd FVRCP vaccination
- healthy kittens weighing at least 1 pound may receive topical flea treatment

*****Remember that you will need to bring your kitten’s kennel card or medical history printout with you to ALL appointments, including surgery appointments*****

Feeding chart

kitten weight and feeding chart

AGE	WEIGHT	AMOUNT PER FEEDING	SCHEDULE
0-1 week	50-150 grams	2-6 ml	Every 2 hours
1-2 weeks	150-250 grams	6-10 ml	Every 2-3 hours
2-3 weeks	250-350 grams	10-14 ml	Every 3-4 hours
3-4 weeks	350-450 grams	14-18 ml	Every 4-5 hours
4-5 weeks	450-550 grams	18-22 ml	Every 5-6 hours
5-8 weeks	550-850 grams	(weaning; offer ample wet food)	Every 6 hours

Comprehensive Guide to Care in the Home

Kittens under the age of 6 weeks need a mother- either a cat or a human surrogate. They are very vulnerable in a shelter and the chance to get them into a foster home within 24 hours is a chance to save their lives. The following guidelines will help you with the care of your kittens and will help you understand the policies and procedures of the foster care program. Please keep the following items on this list in mind before you agree to bring foster animals into your home.

- A foster animal could potentially carry illness into your home that could affect your resident animals' (or humans') health. Personal pets should be up-to-date on their own vaccinations.

- To protect people, young children should not handle the foster kittens and everyone should wash their hands after handling animals, fecal waste, or litter boxes.
- To protect other cats, foster animals should be separated from household pets for at least two weeks. This means that you should also prohibit the sharing of food and water bowls, litter boxes and toys.
- Kittens will be de-fleaed by shelter staff before they enter your home because fleas can spread disease among cats and to people.
- You should wash your hands with soap and water before handling your own animals or children and you may also want to change clothes.
- You should routinely disinfect the foster kittens' quarters and disinfect the entire premises before new kittens are introduced.
- The best way to disinfect the area is to remove all organic material and fecal debris and then soak with Accel or ResQ solution (provided by the shelter) for at least 10 minutes. All surfaces, bowls, toys etc need to be disinfected. For this reason, kittens should not be kept on carpet.
- It is best to have only litter at a time (rear the kittens in cohort groups) rather than constantly adding new kittens in with others. Keeping them in cohorts allows you to prevent disease mixing among cohorts and to disinfect between groups.

Supplies you will need before you bring home kittens (Available in the foster resources area)

Box or carrier

- You may want to use the carrier in which you took the litter home. It will provide a familiar-smelling, dark, quiet home for your foster kitties. However, a bigger box may be desirable, as it will allow you to see in, as well as provide plenty of room for the mother and the new, growing litter of kittens.

Newspapers or Potty Pads

- Keep several layers in the bottom of the box, and they will come in handy when the kittens start to roam around the room and into their litter box.

Small litter box for kittens

- An oblong cake pan is perfect (not provided by the shelter, but highly recommended). Cut-off cardboard boxes also work well.

Cat litter

- Any non-clumping variety of litter will be fine. The clumping litter may be dangerous if ingested by a kitten.

Water bowls

- Heavy and impossible to tip. Should be stainless steel or porcelain/ceramic, NOT plastic, as plastic is difficult to disinfect because it is so porous.

Food bowls (at least 2)

- One is for the eat-at-will dry cat food, the other for canned food. You can use TV dinner trays, paper plates or whatever you have; any relatively flat plate or saucer will do. The larger the litter, the larger the plate should be so that no one gets crowded out.

Food

- You should have both dry kitten food and canned cat food (any brand for kittens). Offer several choices to weaned kittens to determine their preferences.

Heating pad or Snuggle Safe heating disk

- Unless the nursery is at least 85° and your kittens are 4 weeks or older, you need to supply extra heat. **BE SURE THAT THE KITTENS HAVE ROOM TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE HEAT.** For instance, if you are using a heating pad, place it under towels or blankets, and make sure that it covers only half of the floor area of their box. The heating pad should be on "low" or "medium" to prevent overheating the kittens.
- Make sure to cover any electrical cords as well, so that the kittens are not tempted to play and bite on them. Alternatively snuggle safe disks can be used as heat sources. These should also be covered by towels and should be changed regularly to ensure that they stay warm for the kittens to snuggle up against.

Clean towels and blankets

Toys

- Plastic, disinfectable toys are good to reuse for new litters. Kittens can also amuse themselves with empty toilet paper rolls. Empty 12-pack cardboard soda boxes are good for an inventive number of games. Clean tennis balls, old stuffed socks, caps from soda bottles and paper bags are marvelous toys as well. Kittens will also "play" with anything they can find. Drapes, lamp shades and crystal ornaments are as much fun as the toys listed above. Be sure to "kitten-proof" your home. As they grow, their climbing abilities will develop, so anything irreplaceable should be kept out of reach!

Scale

- Critical to success, a food or postal scale will be very helpful in monitoring small kittens' growth, which averages 4 ounces a week.

General care of kittens

- Young kittens should be kept in a large box or cat carrier lined with a towel for easy cleaning. It is very important to keep the kittens warm, and a heating pad is ideal for this. The heating pad should be placed under HALF of the towel (so they can move away from the heat if they need to) and set on "low." The more kittens in your litter, the better able they will be to keep warm by sleeping together in a heap. Small litters and singletons need more help keeping warm. Keep kittens away from heaters or cold drafts.
- If kittens are not urinating and defecating on their own (when they are less than 2 weeks old), they will need to be stimulated. This should be done every few hours (often right after feeding) by gently

rubbing a warm wet paper towel on the kittens anus and genital area. They will pee and poop into the paper towel.

- Keeping kittens clean. A mother works hard to keep her kittens clean, grooming them thoroughly to remove any sticky messes they may get into, such as kitten food or feces. Keeping kittens clean in the absence of their mother can be a messy business, but it is extremely important.
 - A flea comb will get rid of dried feces in the fur. You can also stroke a kitten with a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic a mother's tongue. Be sure to dry him well so he can't chill. Sometimes cat litter and dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between the kitten's toes. This may be softened and removed by dipping the kitten's back end into a basin of warm water. Many kittens will not even notice that they are partially wet, but some will protest violently, and scramble to escape, so beware of sharp little claws!

Maintaining healthy growth of kittens

- Commercially available kitten formula should be given at the kitten's body temperature, about 100 degrees. Once the can is opened or the powder reconstituted, unused formula should be kept refrigerated and discarded after 24 hours. NEVER give a kitten cow's milk (or anything else besides the specified formula).
- It is best to feed the kittens one-by-one, and on a counter-top - this allows them to feed with all four feet on the counter, and their heads level, much as they would if they were nursing from their mom. Some kittens prefer to nurse standing on their hind legs while holding the bottle. They will require a little support from you in this position. Gently open a kitten's mouth with one finger and place the tip of the nipple on his tongue. If he won't eat, try stroking him. Pull lightly on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking. Be sure to tilt the bottle up slightly to prevent the kitten from inhaling too much air. Do not force the kitten to nurse or allow him to nurse too fast. Avoid feeding a kitten while he is cradled on his back - if the fluid goes down the wrong way, it may end up in his lungs.
- After each feeding, the kitten should be burped. Hold him against your shoulder and gently massage his back or pat it lightly.
- Overfeeding is as dangerous as underfeeding kittens! Keep an eye on your kittens at feeding time and monitor how much each is eating. If you see signs of diarrhea, separate them until you find out which one is sick. Your kittens will generally regulate their own food intake. If they need more food, they may whine or suck on their litter mates. A good indication that they are getting enough to eat is the size of their bellies - they should be filled out after a meal, but not bloated. The next section of this protocol discusses amounts of food required at various stages of kitten hood.

<1 Week of age

- Feeding: Bottle Feed every 2 - 3 hours (per feeding chart on pg. 4)
- Environment: The temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 85-90 degrees. Chilling is the number one danger to newborn kittens.
- Behavior & Training : At one week of age, the kittens should weigh 4 oz., and should be handled minimally. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%

1-2 Weeks of age

- Feeding: Bottle feed formula per feeding chart every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated.
- Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 80-85 degrees.
- Behavior & Training : Kittens at 2 weeks of age will weigh about 7 ounces. Ear canals open between 5 and 8 days. Eyes will open between 8 and 14 days. They open gradually, usually starting to open from the nose outward. Short-haired cats' eyes will usually open earlier than those of Persian ancestry. All kittens are born with blue eyes, and initially no pupils can be distinguished from the irises - the eyes will appear solid dark blue.
- Healthy kittens will be round and warm, with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back. When you pick a kitten up, it should wiggle energetically. Healthy kittens seldom cry.
- To determine the sex of the kittens, hold a kitten tummy-up in your hand. In females, the vulva is a vertical slit above the anus; they are very close together. In males, the penile opening is above the anus, but they are separated by a raised scrotal sac and thus seem far apart. It is easiest to see the differences between the sexes if you examine all the kittens and then find two who don't have matching equipment. Don't worry if it is still unclear; by the time the kittens are ready for permanent homes, their sex will be obvious.

2-3 Weeks of age

- Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated.
- Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 75-80 degrees.
- Behavior & Training : Kittens will weigh about 10 ounces. Their ears will become erect. Kittens begin to crawl around day 18. Kittens can stand by day 21. Kittens will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails and paws even before their teeth have come in. Their milk teeth are cut during this period. Kittens learn to sit and touch objects with their paws.
- Kittens begin their socialization phase - they will be strongly influenced by the behavior of their mother for the next six weeks. To further socialize kittens, increase the amount of handling, and get them accustomed to human contact. It is important not to expose them to anything frightening; children may seem intimidating and should be supervised closely while visiting to ensure gentle handling.

3-4 Weeks of age

- Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 3 - 4 hours until kittens are full but not bloated. At this stage kittens may start lapping from a bowl.
- Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be 70-75 degrees from this point onward.
- Behavior & Training: Kittens will weigh about 13 ounces. Adult eye color will begin to appear, but may not reach final shade for another 9 to 12 weeks. Kittens begin to see well and their eyes begin to look and function like adult cats' eyes. Kittens will start cleaning themselves.

4-5 Weeks of age

- Feeding: They can usually drink and eat from a saucer by 4 weeks. Weaning should be done gradually. Introduce them to solid food by offering warmed canned food, mixed with water and formula into a gruel, in a shallow saucer. You can begin by placing one kitten by the plate of canned food gruel, and hoping for the best - if she starts eating, great! Her littermates will probably copy her and do the same. But without mom around to show them, many kittens do not have a clue about feeding time. The kittens will walk in it, slide in it, and track it all over the place. Sometimes one will begin lapping right away, and in its anxiety to consume as much as it can, it will often bite the edge of the plate. Some will prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers. Some will start licking your finger after they sniff it, then slowly lower your finger to the plate and hold it to the food. The kittens need to learn to eat with their heads bent down. Sometimes it takes two or three meals before they catch on. If they do not seem interested enough to even sniff your finger, try gently opening the kittens' mouth and rubbing a little of the food on their teeth. Hopefully then they will start licking your finger
 - Be sure that the kittens have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl.
- Behavior & Training :Begin litter training at four weeks. Use a low box with one inch of non-clumping litter or shredded newspaper. Do not expose the kittens to the clumping variety of litter, as it is harmful if ingested. After each feeding, place the kitten in the box, take his paw, and gently scratch the litter. Be patient! He may not remember to do this every time, or may forget where to find the litter box, but he will learn quickly. Be sure to give the kittens lots of praise when they first start using their boxes. Most will use it from the start, but like other babies, might make an occasional mistake. It is a good idea to confine the kittens to a relatively small space, because the larger the area the kittens have to play in, the more likely they will forget where the litter box is. Keep the litter box clean and away from their food.

5-6 Weeks of age

- Feeding: Feed water gruel 4 times a day. Thicken gruel gradually. Introduce dry food and water. Some kittens will not like canned food. For reluctant eaters, try mixing any meat-flavored human baby food with a little water. The meat flavor is often more appealing to the picky eaters. Be sure the brand you get does not contain onion powder as this ingredient can be hazardous to kittens.
- Behavior & Training: At about five weeks, kittens can start to roam around the room, under supervision. They will weigh 1 pound and the testicles of male kittens will become visible. The strongest, most curious kitten will figure out how to get out of the nest. The others will quickly follow.
- Play with your kittens daily! It is a good idea to wear long sleeves and pants, as they can play roughly and their claws are sharp. If you sit on the floor they will play "King of the Mountain," using your knees and shoulders as vantage points. This game is lots of fun and good exercise for them. Some kittens may be fearful at first; do not force yourself upon them. You can get them used to your presence by sitting in the middle of the room making phone calls; this way they hear your voice but

do not feel threatened. Make them an important part of your household activities; accustom them to the sounds of the TV, vacuum cleaner and other household sounds.

6-7 Weeks of age

- Feeding: Should be eating canned and dry food well. Feed the kittens at least three meals daily. If one kitten appears food-possessive, use a second dish and leave plenty of food out so that everyone is eating. Bear in mind that a kitten at this age has a stomach roughly the size of an acorn, so, although they may not eat much at a single sitting, they like to eat at frequent intervals throughout the day.
- Behavior & Training: By this time, you have "mini-cats." They will wash themselves, use scratching posts, play games with each other, their toys, and you, and many will come when you call them. Be sure to reintroduce them to their litter box after meals, during play sessions, and after naps. These are the usual times that kittens need to use the litter box.

Keeping kittens healthy & recognizing common problems

- A healthy kitten has bright eyes, a sleek coat, and a plump belly. Younger kittens are content to sleep between feedings. As they approach 6 weeks they begin to spend more time playing. Normal body temperature for a kitten is 100 - 102.5. Unfortunately, kittens do become ill and sometimes die while being fostered, so it is important to take steps to prevent disease and treat it appropriately as soon as it appears.
- A note about treating your kitten: In general, if you need to treat a kitten, try to medicate him in an impersonal way. If you hold the kitten in your lap to medicate him, he will associate being picked up with being medicated, and think the worst every time you go to cuddle him. It is better to put the kitten up on a countertop, maybe wrapping him in a towel to administer medication.

Recognizing illness & when to Reach out

If you have a sick kitten, or one who is not gaining weight or is losing weight, you may schedule a telehealth or drop off Vet Appointment for your kitten through the scheduling options on the Foster Resource Page. If you aren't sure what to do, contact the Foster Coordinator.

*****We will provide veterinary care here at the shelter. Outside veterinary care will not be reimbursed.**

Abnormal signs to watch for in a kitten:

- Runny discharge from the eyes or nose. - Follow the URI Protocol (at the end of this document)
- Lack of appetite - Make a telehealth appointment.
- Lethargy (lack of energy) - Make a telehealth or drop off appointment.

- Diarrhea lasting more than 3 or 4 feedings - Follow the Diarrhea Protocol (at the end of this document)
- Vomiting more than once - Make a drop off appointment
- Weight loss - Make a drop off appointment
- coughing and sneezing - Follow the URI Protocol

Emergencies requiring immediate veterinary attention:

- Continuous diarrhea
- Continuous vomiting
- Bleeding of any kind nose, urine, stool
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, limping, stepped on, unconscious.
- Difficulty breathing.
- A kitten that does not respond or that hasn't eaten for more than a day.

Specific disease conditions in kittens

Diarrhea

- Diarrhea is common in kittens and be caused by parasites, viruses, bacteria, food changes, stress, overfeeding, and other causes. If the diarrhea is mild and the kitten is otherwise alert and playful, you can try giving it less food but more often. Kittens can become dehydrated very quickly. If the diarrhea is severe, lasts more than 3 or 4 feedings, or contains blood or obvious parasites, you should call a veterinarian and bring in as much as possible of the feces in a Ziploc bag.
- One of the causes of diarrhea that may be detected by microscopic examination in coccidiosis, due to the protozoan *Eimeria* spp. This single celled parasite is most common in kittens, but occasionally found in adults. Treatment will consist of about ten days of medication in either liquid or pill form. If the symptoms of coccidiosis persist following treatment, an effort will be made to identify other possible causes of diarrhea. *Eimeria* can be spread to other cats, but often does not cause clinical symptoms. It does not spread to people.
- Two other protozoa which are very important in kitten diarrhea are *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*. Also human pathogens, these protozoa produce watery diarrhea which can spread among all other cats, sometimes resolve without treatment, and sometimes require specific medication. Both can be diagnosed provided the veterinarian receives fresh feces. Several large worms can be found in the feces of cats, although few actually cause diarrhea. Kittens can get roundworms from their mothers. These worms can come up in vomitus or stool. The cysts of roundworms can persist for years in soil and be spread to other cats or human children, so it is important to deworm cats as directed by a veterinarian or shelter medical director. Cats can also get whipworms, which actually do produce diarrhea. Even if large worms are not seen in the feces, sometimes microscopic examination can indicate the cysts.
- Cats will sometimes have tapeworms either on their feces or anus. These are spread by fleas or by eating rodents. Although they are not causes of diarrhea and cause relatively little harm, most people seek medication to get rid of the tapes. The bacteria *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*,

Clostridium, and others are all implicated in kitten diarrhea and all require microscopic examination and/or bacterial culture for diagnosis. These and some other fecal pathogens can be spread to people if you are not careful enough with hand washing. Most bacteria respond to antibiotics prescribed by a veterinarian.

- There are a number of viral causes of diarrhea, with panleukopenia being the most devastating. If panleukopenia is suspected, you may have a number of kittens die and you may have to temporarily suspend fostering until the kitten areas can be thoroughly disinfected with bleach. Older cats are rather well-protected with commercial panleukopenia vaccines.

Ear Mites

- Ear mites are tiny parasites which live in the ear canal. They cause intense itching, noted by scratching behind the ears and violent head shaking. Inside the ears you may see a crumbly, dark brown discharge, which may smell bad (the discharge closely resembles coffee grounds). Ear mites are contagious to other cats and can be treated with ear drops or an injection.

Fading Kittens

- Occasionally, one or more kittens in a litter that were healthy and vigorous at birth will begin to "fade" after a week or two of life. They will stop growing, begin to lose weight, stop nursing and crawling. They may cry continuously and lose the ability to stay upright. The mother cat may push them out of the nest, where they often chill and starve to death.
- There is no clear cause or reason for this condition – However, there is a 'kitten fading protocol' which can help save these kittens located on pg. 15 of this guide.

Fleas

- Fleas are insects that love to feed on kittens. Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas commonly attack in large numbers and an infestation can literally lead to anemia and even death. It is essential that your home be free of fleas before bringing home a small kitten.

Upper respiratory tract infection (URI)

- URI is, unfortunately, common in animal shelters. It is caused by airborne viruses and bacteria which are contagious and spread very quickly.

Signs of URI to watch out for:

- Sneezing and discharge from eyes or nose
- Congested breathing
- Loss of appetite

- Lethargy
- Dehydration

Vomiting

If your kitten is vomiting, it is possible that the kitten is eating his meals too quickly. You should watch him when he eats and not allow him to eat too much too quickly. If your kitten vomits 2-3 times in a row, it should see a veterinarian.

Deworming and vaccination schedule

All kittens need to be weighed and given an oral dewormer at 2 weeks of age, or beginning 2 weeks after you bring the kittens home and every 2 weeks thereafter until 8 weeks of age, then monthly until 4 months of age.

All kittens will receive their first vaccination at 4 weeks of age if they weight at least 1 pound and then every 3- 4 weeks until 18 weeks of age.

Common Household Hazards for Kittens

Even the most experienced fosters sometimes overlook household hazards. The following is a list of things that we have seen cause injury to kittens.

- Rocking chairs - keep out of the kittens' area
- Reclining chairs - kittens can easily crawl inside
- Toilets - keep lids closed at all times
- Bathtubs- keep water drained at all times
- Doors - make sure that kittens are not behind doors that are being opened
- Exits - keep unscreened doors and windows closed at all times when not in use
- Outdoors - do NOT allow kittens to go outside, NO EXCEPTIONS!
- Other cats - can sometimes be asymptomatic carriers of viruses that are more harmful to kittens, or can be too aggressive with kittens
- Dogs - all dogs (but especially large dogs) can easily injure a kitten, often accidentally
- Washers and dryers - kittens can crawl inside of the machines unnoticed or get stuck behind them
- Other appliances - make sure that kittens cannot crawl behind or under refrigerators, ovens, etc.
- Holes - make sure any holes in drywall or cabinetry are plugged or blocked
- Small objects - rubber bands, strings, paperclips, and other small objects can be accidentally ingested
- Chemicals - make sure they are put away
- House plants - many are poisonous to cats, make sure they are out of reach

- Electrical cords - can be sprayed with bitter apple, covered with tape or “cord covers” to prevent chewing

In the unfortunate event that one of your kittens has died, for any reason, please contact us right away. Please do not be embarrassed or afraid to reach out – these things happen. Kittens are fragile creatures, and unfortunately some of them are just not equipped to make it in this world.

SUCKLING

- Kittens sometimes develop a habit of suckling on their litter mates. If you observe this behavior the kittens **MUST** be separated. Suckling can be dangerous and sometimes it can even be fatal. They can be separated by putting a partition up in the crate/kennel, or by keeping them in separate crates/kennels.

The last pages of this document contains the following protocols; please become familiar with them:

- Fading Kitten Syndrome
- Diarrhea Protocol
- URI Protocol

Thank you for everything you do, fosters!

FADING KITTEN SYNDROME

- You are not receiving this handout because Fading Kitten Syndrome is a common occurrence, but rather because if you ever encounter this condition, YOU will need to take action IMMEDIATELY. The worst thing you can do for a fading kitten is to take him/her to your vet – most kittens will not survive the car ride. YOU are this kitten’s best chance at making it.
- Fading Kitten Syndrome is a life-threatening emergency in which a kitten “crashes” and begins to fade away. Kittens under 3 weeks old and/or kittens who are, or were recently sick, are most susceptible to FKS. Oftentimes, it occurs in kittens who have been eating poorly, and losing, or, not gaining, weight. This is why it is VITAL that you weigh your kittens every time they’re fed. Although it is rare, FKS can also occur in healthy kittens at any age.

Symptoms of FKS:

- Extreme lethargy — unable to stand or hold head up, not responding when touched
- Body feels cool to the touch (not just insides of ears – all over)
- Panting or gasping for breath
- Meowing/crying out in distress

If you see these symptoms, it is crucial that you take the following steps NOW:

FADING KITTEN SYNDROME PROTOCOL

Step 1: GET KITTEN WARM

- Grab your heating pad and a towel. Place the towel over the heating pad, and place kitten on top of towel. Roll heating pad up to create a “kitten burrito” – like you’re swaddling an infant. Leave the kitten’s face exposed, and do not remove kitten from the burrito even if he/she struggles and cries to get out! Make sure the heating pad is still on the low setting.
- * If you don’t have a heating pad, you can either:
- Keep your dryer running full of towels. Grab a new hot one every 5 minutes and wrap it around the “burrito” towel. After 5 minutes, trade that towel out for a new hot one. Don’t remove the “burrito” towel.
 - Fill 2 socks full of rice, tie the ends so it doesn’t spill out. Throw them in the microwave for 3 minutes. Keep them next to the kitten on the outside of the burrito towel. Every 30 minutes reheat one sock and leave the other next to the kitten so she doesn’t cool off.

Step 2: GET KITTEN'S BLOOD SUGAR UP

- Grab a small bowl and fill it with either corn syrup (Karo, etc), or sugar water. The more sugar content, the better. Make sure you have your syringe handy. Warm the contents up in the microwave for a few seconds until the liquid is a bit above room temperature. You will administer this sugar water (with the syringe) to the kitten while he/she is in the burrito. Give the kitten about 1 drop every 3 minutes.

Step 3: Call the shelter or foster coordinator per the emergency contact guidelines.

- Keep in mind that it can sometimes take hours for them to come out of this state and start acting normally again. Don't give up! Once they do come out of it, make a vet appointment to discuss what could have possibly caused them to fade in the first place, and make sure we have the kitten on all the right medical treatments for any illnesses they have that may have caused it.
- Unfortunately, even if you've employed all of the steps outlined above to a tee, some kittens just won't make it. Cats get pregnant very easily, and have A LOT of kittens, specifically because they are so fragile. If a kitten passes in your care, don't blame yourself – these kittens would have had about a 0% chance of surviving if it wasn't for you. Instead, try to focus on all of the lives you have saved as a foster and the amazing impact you have made for each animal in your care.

Your Kitten has Diarrhea

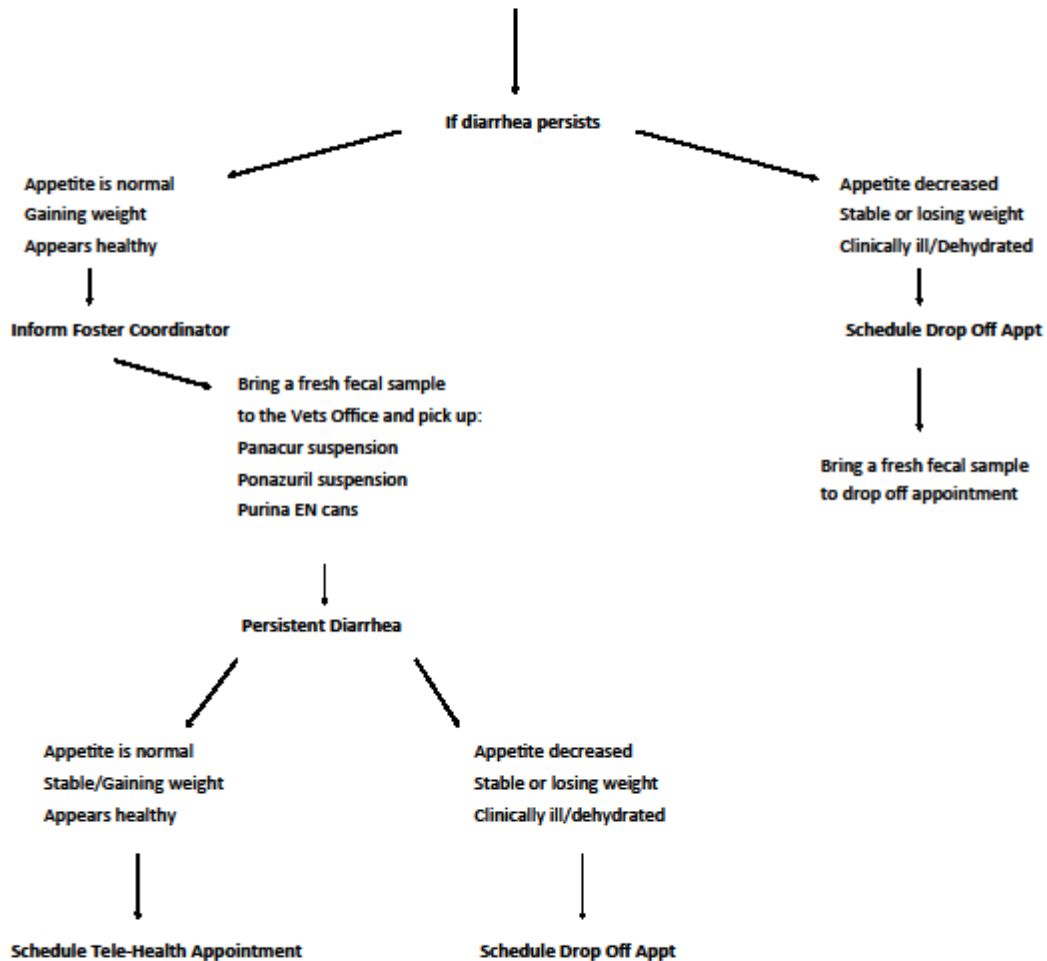
If at any point your kitten is not eating, is losing weight, is lethargic, or appears dehydrated, schedule a drop off exam.

If your kitten is bright, alert, eating well, and seems otherwise healthy please start the following:

Pro-Pectalin (0.1mL per pound 3 times a day for 5 days)

If your kitten is eating solids:

Give 1 teaspoon of canned pumpkin per day (mixed into food)



Your Kitten has a URI

If at any point your kitten is not eating, is losing weight, is lethargic, is having trouble breathing, or appears dehydrated, schedule a drop off exam.

If your kitten is sneezing, has CLEAR nasal or eye discharge and is bright, alert, eating well please start the following:

Keep kitten warm and monitor weight and appetite

Clean eyes and nose with warm water on a cotton ball twice daily

Start humidifier sessions if congested (place carrier in bathroom during a warm shower or use a humidifier)

Instill one drop of saline into each nostril 2-3 times a day

Upper respiratory infections are generally viral in nature, supportive care is what is needed until the kitten recovers

