



Surface Creek Animal Shelter

KITTEN FOSTER CARE MANUAL

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Available 9:00 – 5:00 Monday – Friday

Weekends – Emergencies only

This kitten foster manual has information on preparing for, bringing home, and caring for foster kittens to prepare them for a forever home. Do not hesitate to call the Foster Coordinator if you need any help or assistance with fostering your kittens. We are always here for you, ready to answer any questions that you may have.

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Foster Kitten Timeline

0-3 Weeks of age

A kitten's survival depends on getting consistent nutrition and warmth. Kittens will need to be bottle/syringe fed kitten formula (see Safe Feeding for instructions) then pottied after each feeding (see Elimination for instructions). Kittens must be kept warm since they cannot regulate their body temperature. We will supply heating pads. Your kitten should be vigorously eating and gaining weight. We supply scales for our foster parents to measure weight gain. Daily weights are preferred, before and after feeding takes place. - Eyes will begin to open around 2 weeks of age. - Death in this stage is not uncommon with orphaned babies and death is heartbreaking but not a failure.

3-5 Weeks of age

Kittens under 5 weeks of age may still need an additional heating source. Solid foods can start to be introduced. Bottle feeding may continue, but canned food mixed with formula to create gruel can be introduced. Kibble should be slowly introduced and is best introduced by mixing with gruel. (See Safe Feeding for more details). Kittens should be running and playing often. New textures can be introduced, toys, flooring, blankets. - Eyes will be open and blue.

6 Weeks of age

Kittens should start to wean from bottle feeding. The kittens should be eating kibble and canned food. - They should be drinking water regularly. First vaccinations should be scheduled with the Foster Coordinator. Eye color will begin to change to adult color. - Molars will be coming in and will be very sharp.

7-8 Weeks of age

At week seven if babies are not weaned yet it is time. - Kittens have to be 8 weeks old and at least 3lbs to qualify for spay/neuter surgery. The foster coordinator will schedule all the appointments and

Preparing your Home and Family

Note: Foster kittens must remain indoors only! It is best to keep foster kittens in a separate area and slowly introduce them to the environment. (See Getting Acquainted for more information). 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 or cold for you, it's likely too hot or cold 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.

Getting Acquainted

Being in a new environment may be stressful for kittens. Allow your foster kitten time to adjust to your home while being housed in a "safe space" such as roomy crate or a separate room. Block off small areas where the kitten may try to hide and get stuck. It is much safer to keep a frightened new kitten safely in one kitten-proofed room. If your foster kitten is old enough to walk around, open up your carrier and let the kitten decide whether he/she wants to explore or wants to remain in the carrier. Many times, a kitten may remain in his/her carrier for hours. Never try to pull your new foster kitten out of hiding. Instead, use toys, treats, or food to encourage him/her to come out. If your foster kitten still won't come out, let her be. Kittens need time to adjust to their new environments. Some kittens may need less than a day to adjust; others may need days or weeks to be comfortable enough to explore the entire house without fear. This is normal kitten behavior.

Pet Introductions

If you have personal pets, you'll need to make the introduction to the foster kitten carefully and safely. You will need to have your pet under control and know which behaviors are appropriate when interacting with a kitten. Allow your foster kitten to settle down and get to know its surrounds first. Please speak with the Foster Coordinator if you need additional instructions.

Preparing Food

Kitten milk and food should never be cold or hot. Their milk and food should match your body temperature (about 96 degrees). To prepare milk, use a smoothie shaker or a whisk, to make sure you dissolve all clumps. Mix the KMR as instructed (2:1) with warm water. If you have extra, store it in the refrigerator. To warm the milk after refrigeration, place the bottle containing the KMR into a glass of hot water. Remove the bottle and shake it gently, then test the temperature by squeezing a few drops onto the inside of your wrist (if it is 'body' temperature, you shouldn't feel it). To prepare gruel, add wet food to the bowl, and then add enough warm milk so that the gruel is a pudding-like consistency. If using wet food that has been stored in the refrigerator, use hot water mixed with the kitten milk. When feeding canned food, you can serve directly from the can. If serving canned food that has been refrigerated, you can heat it in the microwave for 10 seconds or add hot water.

Safe Feeding

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 if they are fussy. Support the lower body with 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. Make sure you do not overfeed the kitten by checking her tummy for fullness while feeding. After bottle feeding, gently burp the kitten. You do this by gently rubbing the kitten's back and/or rocking the kitten in a gentle up and down motion. This will allow any air ingested to be expelled, however, you may not hear the kitten "burp". After the kitten has finished feeding, you must now stimulate the kitten to urinate and defecate (see Elimination for details). Kittens should defecate at least once a day and should urinate before or after each feeding.

It is important to note that just like humans, each kitten is different, and they will eat different amounts at different times. Daily weight gain of any amount is an indication that the kittens' needs are being met. When bottle feeding kittens, we are delivering larger volumes of milk at a much faster rate than a nursing mother. Newborn kittens and kittens who have recently lost their mother will need to eat small amounts every two hours. However, from two weeks on, the schedule may vary. Healthy kittens do not need to eat every two hours and you should never wake a healthy kitten for feeding. They need sleep just as much as they need nutrition. Feel free to contact the Foster Coordinator for more information.

Kitten Feeding Chart by Age/Weight

Orphaned Kitten Feeding and Stomach Capacity Table

Estimated Age	Weight (grams)	Weight (ounces)	20 Kcal/100 g body weight ¹	Daily volume Commercial milk replacer (ml) Concentration 0.74 kcal/ml*	Stomach capacity (ml) (4 ml/100 g body weight) ¹	Approx. number of feedings per day**
Newborn	50	1.8	10	13.5	2	7
	75	2.6	15	20	3	7
	100	3.5	20	27	4	7
	125	4.4	25	34	5	7
~ 1 week	150	5.3	30	40	6	7
	175	6.2	35	47	7	7
	200	7.0	40	54	8	7
	225	8	45	61	9	7
~ 2 weeks	250	8.8	50	68	10	7
	275	9.7	55	74	11	7
	300	10.6	60	81	12	6-7
	325	11.5	65	88	13	6-7
~ 3 weeks	350	12.3	70	95	14	6-7
	375	13.2	75	101	15	~6
	400	14.1	80	108	16	~5
	425	15	85	115	17	~5
~ 4 weeks***	450	15.9	90	122	18	~5
	475	16.8	95	128	19	~4
	500	17.6	100	135	20	~4
	525	18.5	105	142	21	~4
~ 5 weeks***	550	19.4	110	148	22	~4

Transitioning Kittens to Wet Food

Transitioning kittens should be fed “gruel,” which is a pudding-like consistency mix of KMR (Kitten Milk Replacement) or water and wet kitten 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. Fresh water should be provided at all times for transitioning kittens. This transition period can take days to weeks.

Daily Care for Kittens Eating on their Own

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.

Elimination

If you are fostering kittens less than 3 weeks of age, it is necessary to stimulate kittens to urinate and defecate. You must therefore gently massage the kitten’s genital area with a warm damp cloth or cotton ball. This should be done after each feeding, and each kitten should pass urine after each feeding, and have a bowel movement at least once a day. Kittens will eventually learn how to use a litter box on their own but accidents are common. If they defecate outside the litter box, move the feces to the litter box. You can also place kittens inside their litter box after meals, or stimulate them in the litter box.

Socializing your Foster Kitten

Socializing is critical for young kittens. They will need multiple short socializing sessions on a daily basis, as well as playtime and enrichment to help them learn to enjoy being around people. Make sure to use every meal time as a socializing event. Offer kittens food and sit with them while they eat. Short socialization sessions several times a day are better than one or two long sessions. Work on getting them used to household noises. Always pair food or playtime with your presence. Give them safe objects to explore, such as paper bags and cardboard boxes. Do not allow them to bite your hands or feet.

Bathing Kittens

Kittens should be kept clean and will often need bathing since they are so messy. Less is more for bathing kittens. Spot clean the kitten with warm water, and if there is food stuck on its face, use a warm damp cloth. Gently pulling on the kitten's fur with a warm damp cloth will simulate the mother's tongue, and help teach the kitten to clean itself. Kittens should not be put back into their home until they are completely dry. You can use a blow dryer on the lowest setting after towel drying.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

It is very important to repeatedly and thoroughly clean and disinfect any areas of your home where your foster kittens are, and any objects foster kittens contact. Daily and weekly cleanings will help keep your foster kittens and any other animals happy and healthy. Not all surfaces may be easily cleaned and disinfected in the environment but thorough and repeated washing and vacuuming helps in decreasing the number of germs in the environment. Unless a veterinary disinfectant is recommended for your foster kitten, vinegar mixed with water 50/50 will be sufficient. When cleaning after your foster kittens have been adopted, and you are preparing for a new foster kitten, we recommend using bleach.

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 animal's environment.

Problem Signs

Please note that young kittens are extremely fragile, and some may die no matter how well you take care of them. 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 your foster kitten passes away, contact the Foster Coordinator as soon as possible.

Newborn kittens are very susceptible to infections and can die within 24 hours. It is important to know some warning sign of problems with your kitten. Please contact the Foster Coordinator if there is excessive crying, kitten is not eating, or kitten is not eliminating. All animals at the shelter are evaluated for age, health, and temperament before being placed in a foster home. There are no guarantees that the animal will not get sick later on so their initial isolation from your companion animals is crucial. We are happy to provide all necessary veterinary care for your foster animals, but cannot treat your resident animals if they become infected as well. All foster animals MUST see an SCAS approved veterinarian. You cannot take the foster animals to your personal veterinarian without prior approval from the Foster Coordinator. Many of the diseases that we deal with in a shelter environment have an incubation period. Your foster animal may have been infected with a disease before they came to the shelter and/or before going to foster, but will not show symptoms until after you have brought them home. Below are some symptoms to look for.

Symptoms

Call the Foster Coordinator IMMEDIATELY for the following symptoms:

- Vomiting blood
- Severe diarrhea, especially in combination with vomiting
- Excessive blood in diarrhea
- Labored breathing
- Unconsciousness, seizures, uneven pupil dilation and fluttering, or fainting
- Severe lethargy or dehydration
- Broken bones

Other symptoms

Call the Foster Coordinator during regular business hours

- Vomiting – more than three times
- Dehydration – To check for dehydration, lift the skin between the kitten's shoulders and drop it back into place. If the skin drops back slowly or bunches up the kitten may be dehydrated. Dry, sticky gums are another sign of dehydration.

- Diarrhea – Although common with kittens, if left unchecked it can lead to death see
- Lethargy or other behavior changes for more than one day
- Weight loss and/or failure to gain weigh – in a kitten eating
- Loss of Appetite – for more than two feedings
- Trouble eating or mouth pain
- Excessive drinking
- Difficult urination, or inability to urinate – watch for sudden accidents in the house, straining, bloody, or discolored urine.
- Sneezing – with or without nasal discharge for more than one day
- Eye problems – squinting, redness, swelling, or discharge
- Ear problems – head shaking, scratching at ears, or ear discharge
- Coughing – for more than one day
- Hair loss – with or without scabs, scales, crusts, scratching

Weighing Kittens

It's important to keep track of a kitten's weight to make sure they are progressing appropriately. Weight gain (or loss) can be an indicator of a kitten's health. Young kittens gain weight quickly and slow down a bit once they reach one pound. Below is a weight chart as a guideline for what kittens should weigh by age.

Kitten Age	Kitten Weight
Newborn	3 - 7 ounces
1 Week	5 - 10 ounces
2 Weeks	8 - 14 ounces
3 Weeks	10 oz - 1.1 lb
4 Weeks	12 oz - 1.3 lb
5 Weeks	14 oz - 1.8 lb
6 Weeks	1 - 2 pounds
7 Weeks	1.2 - 2.3 pounds
8 Weeks	1.4 - 2.6 pounds
9 Weeks	1.6 - 2.9 pounds
10 Weeks	1.8 - 3.1 pounds