



KITSAP HUMANE SOCIETY

KITTEN AND
BOTTLE BABY
FOSTER
MANUAL

9167 Dickey Road NW
Silverdale, WA 98383
360.692.6977
www.kitsap-humane.org/foster-care

Table of Contents

General Guidelines and Expectations of Kitten Care.....	3
The Four Tenets of Kitten Care.....	4
Preparing for Your First Foster.....	5
A New Kitten’s First Stop: Quarantine!.....	6
Kitten Handling and Socialization	7
Kitten Feeding, Care, and Development.....	8
Neonatal Care: Bottle Baby Kittens	11
Moms and Litters	14
Kitten Wellness 101	15
Panleukopenia and Ringworm: Two Hardy, Highly Contagious Diseases	19
Kitten Veterinary Care	20
Fading Kitten Syndrome and How to Respond.....	23
Maddie’s Pet Assistant App	24
The Home Stretch! Preparing to Return Your Kittens	25
Additional Resources	26

Foster Department Contact Information:

Email is the primary and easiest way to contact the foster team. Please address your emails to all team members to ensure a prompt response.

Foster Manager

Holly Faccenda

hfaccenda@kitsap-humane.org

Foster Lead

Gina Lehner

&

Foster Assistant

Betty Santos

foster@kitsap-humane.org

Welcome! Before you get started, some basics...

Kittens under 8 weeks of age represent one of the most vulnerable and in need groups at KHS. Young kittens may require round-the-clock care and their incomplete immune system makes them highly susceptible to the common illnesses found in a shelter environment.

Foster homes represent a haven for these vulnerable animals and by following proper guidelines, you can keep yours that way.

General Guidelines and Expectations of Kitten Care

Health and Sanitation

- Foster kittens can carry illnesses into your home that could affect your health, the health of your resident animals, and future foster animals. You accept this risk when you agree to foster. KHS does not have the funds to pay for illness to personal animals and cannot be held responsible.
- All new foster kittens MUST be properly quarantined in a fully sanitizable space (absolutely NO carpet) for at least 2 weeks. Your foster kitten's quarantine may need to be extended if they are actively sick. When in doubt, check in with the foster team before letting your foster kittens out of their quarantine space.
- Wash or sanitize your hands before and after handling animals, their supplies, or their bodily secretions (vomit, feces, etc.).
- Kitten living quarters and supplies should be cleaned daily and disinfected weekly. When cleaning, place the kittens in a separate, sanitizable space such as their carrier or a spare bathroom until their space is clean and completely dry.
- Foster parents must be able to bring their kittens in for routine vaccinations every 2 weeks to prevent a gap in their immunity and for medical care, as necessary.
- It is highly recommended to keep a daily journal on your kitten's general health and appearance, including weight, appetite, litter box habits, etc. The foster department has monitoring sheets that you may use as an example.

Housing and Handling

- Foster kittens MUST be kept indoors at all times and in their carrier when being transported.
- Each foster home can have a maximum of two litters of kittens at a time IF you can keep each litter separate and maintain proper quarantines. If you are fostering two litters of kittens, you should keep them separated the entire time, even once out of quarantine, unless approved by the Foster Manager.
- Young children should not handle newborn foster kittens as they are extremely fragile. Once the kittens can walk and play on their own, children must be supervised closely and taught proper handling techniques.

Returning from Foster

- Generally, foster kittens are ready for spay/neuter surgery and to become available for adoption when they are healthy, over 8 weeks old, and weigh at least 2 lbs. Returns are scheduled with the Foster Manager or Foster Lead and depend on the current shelter capacity.

The Four Tenets of Kitten Care

While the needs of individual kittens will vary, four tenets or core principles guide kitten care across the ages. By ensuring that you are meeting these core needs for your kittens, you will be setting them up for long-term success.

Keep Them Fed

Kittens naturally eat small, frequent meals. Bottle babies may require round-the-clock feedings every 2-3 hours, even overnight. Weaned kittens should always have access to dry food and be offered wet food multiple times a day. Experiment with various flavors and styles of wet food until you find one preferred by your kitten.

Keep Them Warm

Kittens cannot regulate their body temperature until at least 4 weeks of age. You must always provide appropriate heat to young kittens. Supplemental heat sources include rice bags (short-term only), warming discs, heating pads (be sure to cover exposed cords), and infrared lamps (securely out of reach.) Kittens should always have the ability to remove themselves from the heat if they wish. *Note, the required ambient temperature varies by kitten age.*

Keep Them Clean

Dried on food, feces, or urine can result in fur loss, skin irritation, and even infection. Any debris on your kitten should be removed promptly with a warm, damp washcloth. Flea combs can be a useful tool for gently removing caked-on debris. Full baths should be reserved for extremely dirty or flea-ridden kittens. Use only a gentle dish soap like Dawn. NEVER administer flea treatment or flea shampoo to a foster animal. Always dry your kitten completely after washing.

Keep Them Healthy

Kittens are born with virtually no immunity so care must be taken to not introduce pathogens into their space. Make it a habit to monitor their weight, appetites, urine/feces output, and overall body condition daily. Alert your foster team of any concerning changes. Healthy kittens should be bright, alert, active, and gaining weight steadily.

Your foster kittens depend on YOU for all their needs. Your foster team at KHS is here to support you in meeting those needs and with any concerns that arise. We are always happy to answer questions, share tips and tricks, and teach you new skills as your foster career progresses. Fostering is a continuous learning experience!

Preparing for Your First Foster

Kitten Foster Supply Check List

Before you bring home your first foster kitten, make sure you have all the necessary supplies at the ready. The last thing you want is to bring home a kitten (or several) and find you're missing critical supplies! KHS is happy to help you with supplies. We can always supply essential items such as food, bedding, bottle feeding supplies (formula, bottles, nipples, etc.), and food/water bowls. For more "specialty" items such as baby wipes, puppy pads, kitchen scales (for weighing your kittens), etc., we rely heavily on donations and can supply these types of items as our stock allows. If foster parents wish to purchase their supplies or supplement with ours, this is always an option as well.

Cat carrier: KHS supplies foster families with carriers that must be returned with the kittens when they return for adoption.

Low-sided litter box: Cut-down cardboard boxes or pie tins work well, just be sure that it is low enough for a small kitten to step into!

Cat litter: Any non-clumping variety of litter will work. If ingested, clumping litter can cement in a kitten's intestines and cause a fatal blockage.

Clean towels and blankets: You will want to change bedding daily, so having plenty of extra towels on hand is a lifesaver! Fleece blankets are best for young kittens who easily snag their claws on looped fabrics.

Toys: Plastic, disinfectable toys are good to reuse for new litters. Kittens can also amuse themselves with empty toilet paper rolls that you dispose of after each litter.

Water bowls: Should be heavy and difficult to tip over. Make sure the water bowl is shallow enough so that the kittens can easily reach the water.

Food bowls (at least 2): One is for the eat-at-will dry cat food, and the other is for canned food. Bigger litters will need multiple bowls. Ensure the food bowls are shallow enough that the kittens can easily reach the food.

Food: You should have a supply of dry kitten food and canned kitten food (generally pate-style is best). Always have food and water available and offer a few varieties in the case of picky eaters.

Heat: Unless your kittens are 4 weeks or older and their room stays 70F or above, you need to provide a heat source. Options include heating pads, warming discs, or infrared lamps. Make sure your kittens can move away from the heat as needed.

Scale: A food or postal scale is required to track kittens' growth and to catch early signs of potential health concerns. You can also predict when they will be 2 lbs and ready for surgery based on their rate of gain.

A New Kitten's First Stop: Quarantine!

To keep current and future foster animals safe from communicable diseases, as well as protect resident animals in your home, a 2-week quarantine in a fully sanitizable space for your new foster kittens is **MANDATORY**. Most illnesses, such as ringworm, panleuk, or upper respiratory infection, will begin showing symptoms within 2 weeks. In the event, your kitten DOES present with a communicable disease while in quarantine, this protocol will have kept any pathogens isolated to a single, easily sanitizable space.

By fully sanitizable space, we mean absolutely no carpet, poorly sealed/gapped wooden flooring, upholstered furniture, rugs, or other porous surfaces that can't be properly disinfected. All toys, bedding, and cat furniture should be either machine washable or made of a non-porous material that can be cleaned with a bleach solution (i.e., no carpeted/rope cat trees in quarantine land.)

While most kitten illnesses would not be contagious to a healthy, vaccinated adult cat, they do stay in the environment for a long time unless it is properly treated with a bleach solution.

This could prevent you from being able to foster kittens again in the future.

Bathrooms often make ideal quarantine spaces, require very few alterations, and can easily be disinfected with a bleach solution. It is possible to create a quarantine space in a spare room or office if all the same safety and sanitation requirements are met.

A dedicated "quarantine outfit" that is worn whenever in your quarantine space is a great way to limit possible pathogen transmission via your clothes. This outfit should include a loose-fitting pair of pants, a shirt, and slippers or socks. Hang your outfit out of kitten reach within the quarantine space when not in use. Always be mindful of items entering and leaving your quarantine space and where they go.

Once the 2-week quarantine is over, kittens are permitted to explore your household! Take it room by room and ensure that there are no potential hazards for them to get into. Block off tight spaces where kittens may hide, remove falling or choking hazards, protect power cables and outlets, and remove tempting plants. Once they return for adoption, your quarantine space can be fully sanitized and made ready for the next batch of kittens.



Example Quarantine/Foster Space Setup

1. Helpful extra: board to organize notes, treatment sheets, etc.
2. Keep supplies in a secure, sanitizable cabinet or a separate room
3. Cardboard boxes are great, disposable toys for kittens!
4. Non-porous food and water dishes, ideally ceramic or stainless steel
5. A super cozy, *machine washable* cat bed
6. Cat toys galore! Plastic/machine washable for health safety
7. Hand sanitizer! Always clean your hands after foster interactions
8. A low-sided litter tray is ideal for young kittens.
9. No carpet here! Non-porous floors are a must for proper sanitation
10. A secure door keeps your kittens safely in this space

Kitten Handling and Socialization

Some of the kittens that we take in have never lived in a home with humans and may initially find everyday things like opening doors, using a vacuum, or even the sound of human voices very frightening. Even well-socialized kittens may initially be nervous in new surroundings and meeting new people.

Slow and Steady Wins the Race

When you first bring home a new foster kitten, it is often best to allow them a decompression period of 24-48 hours to settle in and get used to their new environment. Feral or semi-feral kittens may need longer to decompress. This allows them to learn the smells, sights, and sounds of their temporary home without the additional pressure or stress of human interaction. During this period, keep your interactions short and sweet, only entering their space for feedings or cleaning. Keeping a regular schedule can be especially beneficial to shyer, undersocialized kittens, as it allows them to anticipate your arrival.

After acclimating, outgoing, friendly kittens can be cuddled and played with freely. If kittens are shy or apprehensive, spend time simply being in the same room—sit on the floor quietly reading or doing another task, and try to resist the urge to handle them. Allow them to explore at their own pace and it won't be long before they are crawling all over you.

Handling a Kitten

If you need to pick up a kitten, the best way is to slip one hand under its chest, holding the front legs with your fingers. At the same time support the hind legs with your other hand, sort of like a tiny, furry football. Kittens generally feel more secure when held close to your body. If you have a frightened kitten, it may be best to wrap a towel around them and securely cover their feet before lifting them to prevent getting scratched.

NEVER force yourself on a frightened kitten unless medically necessary. This can be hazardous for you and damaging to your socialization efforts. Force petting or holding a frightened animal can build negative associations with human interaction.

Very young, neonatal kittens are quite delicate and should be handled minimally. Children should always be supervised when interacting with kittens and taught proper handling techniques ahead of time.

Food: The Golden Ticket

Food is truly the way to a kitten's heart and is one of the most useful socialization tools at your disposal.

Mealtimes can become the gateway to earning a kitten's trust. Use wet food sessions to build a connection between super yummy wet food and human interaction. Always start slowly. Begin with sitting at a distance and talking gently to your kitten while they eat. Gradually work your way up to a gentle pet or two while they are engrossed in their meal. For kittens that are hand-shy, offering particularly tasty food from your fingertip can help them learn that hands are nothing to fear.

Meat-based baby food, squeezable cat treats, or tuna in water can often tempt even the most reluctant kittens.

Just ensure these are given as treats and not as their main source of food.

Kitten Feeding, Care, and Development

Kittens experience a tremendous amount of growth and development in a relatively short period and the care requirements of a 3-week-old kitten are dramatically different than that of a 6-week-old kitten. By ensuring proper housing, feeding, and enrichment, you will help your kitten to grow into a healthy, confident young adult!

Kitten Stages

In their first few weeks of life, kittens are essentially helpless. They are unable to regulate their body temperature and their vision and hearing are still developing. For all these reasons and more, neonatal kittens should be confined to a nursery area and handled minimally for the first 1-2 weeks.

From 3 weeks on, kittens begin to rapidly develop, both in size and behavior. From the first purr around week 3 to their first successful “hunt” in week 5, watching kittens grow and develop into individuals is one of the great joys of fostering kittens.

See the chart on the next page for a timeline of kitten feeding and development expectations.

Feeding Kittens

It is important that your kitten receives, and eats, an appropriate amount of food each day to fuel its rapid growth and development. *For feeding neonatal or “bottle baby” kittens, please refer to the section on “Neonatal Care.”*

Weaned kittens should always have dry food available and be offered portions of wet food throughout the day. It’s important to try a few different food options when you first bring home a kitten to ensure you have food they will eat reliably. Try offering different flavors, textures, and brands until you find a winner.

Tracking Meals and Growth

For kittens eating on their own, you’re unlikely to overfeed them, but it is certainly possible to be *underfeeding* them. On average a 4–5-week-old kitten should consume about one 3oz can of kitten food per day, plus dry food. A 6–8-week-old kitten should eat about two cans per day, about 1/4-1/2 cup of dry, or a combination of the two. As a general rule, allow your kitten to eat until they leave a little behind, indicating a full tummy!

In addition to tracking their weight, it can also be beneficial to track what kind of food you are feeding your kitten, how much food you’re offering, and how much they are eating. In the event your kitten is failing to gain weight appropriately, meal tracking can help us assess the underlying cause.

Sudden changes in diet can lead to diarrhea in your kitten, so it is generally best to introduce new foods gradually.

A healthy, well-fed kitten should gain about ½ ounce (0.03 lbs) per day or about 4 ounces (0.25 lbs) per week.

If a kitten is not gaining or is losing weight, the foster team should be alerted right away. Especially in young kittens, a failure to gain weight could quickly become life-threatening.

Kitten Feeding and Development Expectations

Week	Feeding	Development
0-1	Bottle feed formula per manufacturer instructions every 2-3 hours. Overnight feedings may be every 3-4 hours.	Kittens should weigh about 4oz and should be handled minimally. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%. Nest box temp should be 85-90 degrees. Chilling is the number one danger to newborns.
1-2	Bottle feed formula per manufacturer instructions every 2-3 hours. Overnight feedings may be every 3-4 hours.	Kittens should weigh about 7-8oz. Ear canals open between 5-8 days. Eyes will open between 8-14 days. All kittens are born with blue eyes. Healthy kittens will be round and warm with pink skin. Nest box temp should be 80-85 degrees.
2-3	Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 3-4 hours. Overnight feedings can be every 4-5 hours.	Kittens should weigh about 10oz. Ears erect. Kittens begin to crawl around day 18. Kittens can stand by day 21. Kittens will begin to play. Kittens learn to sit and touch objects with their paws. The socialization phase begins. Nest box temp should be 75-80 degrees.
3-4	Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 4-6 hours. Overnight feedings are not required unless kittens not thriving.	Kittens should weigh about 13 ounces. Adult eye color will begin to appear. Kittens' eyes begin to function like adult cats' eyes. Kittens will start attempting to clean themselves. Begin litter training. Kittens may start to wean. Nest box temp should be 70-75 degrees from this stage onward.
4-5	If not weaned, bottle-feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 8 hours. They can usually drink and eat from a saucer by this age.	Kittens should weigh around 1lb (16oz). Kittens can start to roam around the room, under supervision. Kittens will start to be more interested in human interaction. Group play develops and hierarchies may emerge.
5-6	Feed slurry 4 times a day. Thicken the mixture gradually. Always have dry food and water available. For reluctant eaters, try mixing any meat-flavored human baby food with a little water. Make sure it doesn't contain onion powder which is hazardous for kittens.	Play with your kittens daily! Some kittens may be fearful at first; do not force yourself upon them. Try sitting in their room and reading aloud to get them used to your voice. Continue working on socialization and acclimating them to household sounds such as vacuum cleaners and the TV.
6-7	Kittens should be eating both wet and dry food. Use multiple dishes for large litters or with possessive individuals. Kittens naturally eat small, frequent meals, so be sure to offer food throughout the day.	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.
7-8	Offer wet food 3-4 times a day (each kitten will be eating a little over one can of food per day) and have dry food and water available.	Continue play and socialization with the kittens.
8+	Offer wet food 2-3 times a day and always have dry food and water available.	By the end of the 8th week, kittens should weigh around 2 pounds. If all the kittens weigh 2 pounds, they are ready for their spay/neuter surgery and to be available for adoption!

Neonatal Care: Bottle Baby Kittens

Overview

Orphaned kittens need a significant level of care until they are ready to be weaned and are eating on their own. It is the responsibility of a foster parent to ensure their kittens are receiving proper nutrition, hydration, adequate housing, and that they are consistently gaining weight during this crucial time.

Getting Started

You will need to purchase an animal nursing kit at a pet store that includes a bottle, extra nipples, and a cleaning brush. KHS can also provide you with these supplies (including kitten formula) to get you started! Cut a small "X" or poke a series of holes with a paperclip in the tip of your first nipple. You know that you have made the nipple opening just big enough if, when the bottle is held upside-down, the formula drips slowly from it. Too small an opening will make the kittens work too hard to get their formula, tiring them out before they've had enough to eat. Too large an opening will force too much formula into them, too fast. Miracle Nipples come pre-cut and fit both syringes and most bottles.

Please note that before you start feeding your kitten, you should assess their body temperature – NEVER feed a cold kitten!

Place them on a heat source to regulate their body heat before proceeding with feeding.

Feeding supplies should be sterilized often and it is generally best to use a fresh bottle at each feeding to reduce the chance of introducing bacteria or other pathogens. To sterilize your bottle-feeding supplies, rinse bottles and nipples thoroughly then place them into a boiling water bath for 5-10 minutes.

Only a formula specifically made for kittens (kitten milk replacer/KMR) should be fed, such as Pet Ag KMR or Breeder's Edge KMR. NEVER give a kitten cow's milk (or anything else besides the specified formula) as this can lead to gastric issues and nutrient deficiencies. KHS mixes formula according to manufacturer instructions. Shaker bottles are handy tools for easily mixing and storing kitten formula. The unused formula should be labeled with the date/time and refrigerated. Discard leftover formula after 24hrs.

Bottle Feeding Supplies



Mastering Feeding Time

Fosters and kittens may have different preferred feeding styles. Some fosters feed on a table or countertop while others feed on their laps. Kittens should be fed in a position that mimics how they would naturally be nursing from mom; all four feet pointed towards the ground and their heads level. However, some kittens may prefer to nurse standing on their hind legs while holding the bottle, or while wrapped in a hand towel like a burrito. Regardless, kittens should be kept in a mostly horizontal position with feet towards the ground. NEVER feed a kitten on its back like a human baby— this is extremely unsafe.

Examples of Proper Bottle Feeding



Formula should be fed at kitten body temperature (which is slightly higher than our own.) The best way to warm formula is by placing the bottle in a hot water bath. Test the formula temperature by squirting a few drops onto the inside of your wrist; it should feel warm but not hot.

To feed, gently open a kitten's mouth with one finger and place the tip of the nipple on their tongue. If they don't begin suckling, try petting them down the back; this replicates a mother cat grooming and can be an effective stimulant. Pull lightly on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking or try moving the nipple back and forth on the kitten's tongue. Be sure to keep the bottle at a 45-degree angle to prevent the kitten from sucking in air.

Do not force the kitten to nurse or allow them to nurse too fast. It can take kittens some time to get used to nursing from a bottle. Be patient and go drop by drop if needed, allowing them to swallow in between – they'll get the hang out of it!

Bottle Feeding Tips

Hold their head steady with your non dominant hand while you use your dominate hand to control the bottle or syringe.

If the kitten isn't latching, try different nipple sizes and warming up the nipple in warm water prior to feeding.

You should never squeeze the bottle of formula when feeding kittens as this can cause aspiration. Aspiration occurs when the kitten inhales formula into their lungs while feeding. Aspiration can lead to serious complications.

After each feeding, the kitten should be burped by gently patting their back or sides a few times – it’s uncommon to hear a kitten physically burp so a few gentle pats should be sufficient when burping a kitten. If not done before feeding, they should be stimulated to urinate/defecate. This is done by gently rubbing a damp cloth or cotton ball on your kitten’s genitals and rectum until they eliminate. If you use a damp cloth, be sure to use a dry cloth afterward to ensure the kitten’s genitals and rectum are dry. Kittens should urinate at every feeding and defecate about once a day.

How Much to Feed

Overfeeding bottle babies can be as dangerous as underfeeding! Neonates are still developing, and their digestive systems can only process so much at a time. Kittens should be fed an amount and at a frequency appropriate for their age. Refer to the *Kitten Bottle Feeding and Stomach Capacity Chart from Maddie’s Fund* below.

Estimated Kitten Age (weeks)	Kitten Weight (lbs, oz)	Kitten Weight (grams)	Daily Caloric Requirement*	Amount of Formula Per Day (ml)**	Amount Per Feeding (ml)*	Approximate Number of Feedings Per Day***
< 1 week	2 oz	57 g	11 kcal	15 ml	2 ml	7
	3 oz	85 g	17 kcal	23 ml	3 ml	7
1 week	4 oz	113 g	23 kcal	31 ml	5 ml	7
	5 oz	142 g	28 kcal	38 ml	6 ml	7
	6 oz	170 g	34 kcal	46 ml	7 ml	7
	7 oz	198 g	40 kcal	54 ml	8 ml	7
2 weeks	8 oz	227 g	45 kcal	61 ml	9 ml	7
	9 oz	255 g	51 kcal	69 ml	10 ml	7
	10 oz	283 g	57 kcal	77 ml	11 ml	7
3 weeks*	11 oz	312 g	62 kcal	84 ml	12 ml	6-7
	12 oz	340 g	68 kcal	92 ml	14 ml	6-7
	13 oz	369 g	74 kcal	100 ml	15 ml	6
	14 oz	397 g	79 kcal	107 ml	16 ml	5
	15 oz	425 g	85 kcal	115 ml	17 ml	5
4 weeks*	16 oz (1 lb)	454 g	91 kcal	123 ml	18 ml	5
	1 lb, 1 oz	482 g	96 kcal	130 ml	19 ml	4
	1 lb, 2 oz	510 g	102 kcal	138 ml	20 ml	4
	1 lb, 3 oz	539 g	108 kcal	146 ml	22 ml	4
5 weeks*	1 lb, 4 oz	567 g	113 kcal	153 ml	23 ml	4

Keep an eye on your kittens at feeding time and monitor how much each is eating. Keep a written record of mealtimes and the amount consumed. Try feeding smaller amounts but more frequently if your kitten is struggling to consume their suggested amount in one sitting, and gradually decrease the number of feedings as they start consuming more at once. The amount of formula being fed should continue to slowly increase as your kitten ages.

Alert the foster team promptly if your bottle baby is eating poorly or is losing weight.

Weaning, a Glorious and Messy Time!

Weaning is the process of teaching kittens to eat on their own and typically begins at 3-4 weeks old. It is an equally exciting and messy time of a kitten's journey. To bridge the gap between nursing and solid foods, we begin by offering a shallow dish of slurry (wet food mixed with warm water or formula) to an applesauce-like consistency. You can similarly introduce dry food by soaking it in water first.

The weaning process can be a messy time. After each feeding, make sure to clean excess slurry off their fur to avoid hair loss and skin irritation.

Begin by placing one kitten near the plate of the slurry mixture; if they start eating, their littermates will probably catch on. Without a mother to show them, many kittens do not know how to lap or chew and will end up walking, sliding, and tracking slurry all over the place at first. Sometimes one will begin lapping right away and bite the edge of the plate while they figure it out. Some will lick the slurry off your finger and then you can slowly lower your finger to the plate and hold it to the food. If they don't seem interested in the food at all, try gently opening the kitten's mouth and rubbing a little wet food along their gums to introduce the flavor. Kittens need to learn to eat with their heads bent down and it can take a few feedings to master.

During the weaning process, you should continue to offer a bottle after each slurry meal to ensure your kitten is getting enough calories. As they master munching, you can gradually cut back on this supplemental bottle feeding. Be sure that the kittens always have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl.

Moms and Litters

If you get a litter of neonatal kittens with a mother cat, you are in luck! She will do most, if not all, of the care necessary for the kittens including feeding, taking care of their bathroom habits, and teaching them everything they need to know to be awesome cats.

It is important to have a warm, comfortable place for mom to nurse her babies, but it is equally as important to give her space to stretch her legs. A bathroom with the kittens set up in the bathtub or a nesting box is ideal because mom can easily hop out to get some alone time. Mom will need to observe a 2-week quarantine, just like her kittens.

An attentive mother should teach her kittens to eat on their own and use the litter box. If kittens are stubbornly refusing solid foods and continuing to nurse, it may be time to start separating mom for part of the day to encourage kittens to eat on their own. *Consult with the*

Example Nesting Box Setup



foster team before doing so. Always offer food and try encouragement techniques with the kittens before allowing the mother to nurse again.

Caring for Mom

While she is nursing, be sure to have water, wet food, and dry food available to her at all times because almost all her calories will be spent feeding her babies. Because of this, nursing queens can be lethargic but otherwise healthy. You should still be monitoring mom for dehydration, rapid weight loss, lack of appetite, or severe lethargy, which could indicate illness.

If you have a sick mother cat, she might not produce enough milk for her babies and/or not want to care for them. In these cases, you will have to supplement with bottle feeding and other care. ***Even with an attentive mother cat, you should still be weighing the kittens regularly to ensure everyone is getting enough food and growing appropriately.***

Socialization with Moms

Most mother cats will be attentive to their babies and social with humans and will teach their kittens to be that way. However, when mother cats are unsocial or semi-feral, it is especially important for you as the foster parent to socialize the kittens. If the mother cat inhibits socialization or won't let you near her babies and they are fully weaned, it may be beneficial to separate mother and kittens. This decision is made on a case-by-case basis by the Foster Manager or Foster Lead.

Kitten Wellness 101

A healthy kitten has bright eyes, a sleek coat, and a plump belly. Younger kittens are content to sleep between feedings and as they approach 8 weeks, they begin to spend more time playing. The normal body temperature for a kitten is 100-102.5 F. Unfortunately, kittens do become ill and sometimes die while in foster care, so it is important to prevent disease and treat it as soon as it appears.

Performing a General Physical Exam

Whenever you bring home a new foster animal (once they are comfortable with handling) you should perform a general physical exam on them. Familiarize yourself with their general physical appearance and take note of any irregularities. We highly encourage you to take photos or videos of anything odd or concerning with your kitten and email us for guidance.

	Normal	Abnormal
General Appearance	Bright, alert, responsive Balanced and coordinated Interested in surroundings	Lethargic, disoriented Uncoordinated Non-engaged, “staring into space”
Eyes	Clean and clear No discharge	Visible third eyelid when not sleeping Watery, red, or colored discharge Irregular pupil size
Ears	Clean, both outer ear and pinna Pink and clean inner ear	Discharge (waxy or other) Crusty Scratching, shaking ear/head Red/Inflamed ear canal
Nose	Clean, no discharge	Scabbed Discharge (clear, mucus, bloody) Congested or blocked
Mouth	Eating/swallowing normally Gums pink and return to color 1-2 seconds after being pressed	Problems eating/swallowing Persistent vomiting Pale/white gums Drooling Foul odor
Skin/Hair	Shiny, glossy coat Oil-free coat Clean	Bald or thinning spots Dry or flaky skin Oily/dirty looking coat Scabs Visible fleas, ticks, lice, or other parasites.
Legs/Feet	Walking normally Healthy pads and nails	Limping Cracked or hard pads Irregular gait Pain response when an area is touched
Anal/Genital	Clean and free of discharge Normal stool	Discharge Abnormal stool (diarrhea or extremely hard stools) Excessive defecation or urination Posturing/vocalizing in the litterbox Visible parasites Redness/inflammation

Common Ailments in Kittens

Most of the kittens that we take in have unknown histories, meaning, we have no way of knowing what illnesses they may have been exposed to or parasites they may have picked up. *This is why our mandatory 2-week quarantine period is so important.*

During your foster career, there are a few common ailments you are likely to run into with your kittens. Learning to promptly identify signs of illness and alerting the foster team is crucial to speeding up your kitten’s recovery. If you notice any of these illnesses, please contact your foster team. Do not self-treat at home.



Figure 1 A kitten with a significant URI. Note the inflamed eyes and ocular and nasal discharge.



Figure 2 A kitten with conjunctivitis. Note the redness and swelling of its left eye.



Figure 3 A score 5-6 kitten stool. Note the overall lack of distinct logs and liquid consistency. Also note the greyish color which can indicate overfeeding.

Illnesses

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

Nasal discharge accompanied by sneezing and sometimes ocular discharge. Your kitten is likely to feel “dumpy” and may not be eating its normal amount. Full-blown URI is diagnosed when the kitten has colored nasal discharge. Clear or cloudy nasal discharge, or the absence of nasal discharge but the existence of ocular discharge and/or sneezing, might be diagnosed differently.

Conjunctivitis

Colored, cloudy, or clear discharge from the tear duct. Often accompanied by squinting and eye redness or puffiness.

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

Your kitten may be spending large amounts of time in the litter box digging and squatting, with minimal urination. Urination may be in small amounts, dark in color, and accompanied by vocalizations by the kitten. A urine sample is required to determine the form of infection, which is taken at the shelter.

NOTE: If your kitten is straining to urinate and NOT producing any urine, they may be experiencing a potentially life-threatening urinary blockage. This is an emergency and the foster team should be alerted immediately.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is common in kittens and may be caused by parasites, viruses, bacteria, food changes, weaning off formula, stress, overfeeding, or other causes. Be sure to notify your foster team that your kitten is having loose stools.

Treatment: If the diarrhea is mild and the kitten is otherwise alert and playful, we suggest feeding smaller more frequent meals rather than a few bigger meals throughout the day and adding 1/8 teaspoon of pure pumpkin puree (not pumpkin pie filling) to the food to help get rid of diarrhea. If loose stools persist past 48 hours, notify the foster team as severe dehydration can occur quickly in kittens with persistent diarrhea, and medical intervention is required.

Parasites

Ear Mites

Ear mites are tiny parasites that 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 resembling coffee grounds, and the ears may have a bad smell.

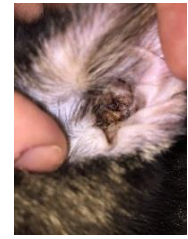


Figure 1 Ear mites

Roundworms

Roundworms are not, in fact, round, though under a microscope their eggs are. Roundworms are often found excreted in stool and described as “spaghetti-like” - yum! They are the most common culprit of the bloated potbelly that many young animals enter the shelter with.



Figure 2 A roundworm in fresh stool

Tapeworms

Tapeworms have long, segmented bodies that frequently break off into small sections. Most often, you will find tiny, individual segments that look like white rice in an animal's feces. You may also find tapeworm segments or eggs that resemble sesame seeds located around the anus.



Figure 3 On the left, tapeworm segments. On the right, tapeworm eggs.

Coccidia

Coccidia is single-celled parasites that love to take up residence in the intestinal wall and cause all kinds of mischief. While you won't spot wild coccidia with the naked eye, coccidia does generally lead to a very distinct, yellowish, loose, and foul-smelling stool.

Fleas

We've all seen these little pests – small black bugs that run and jump quickly. Most commonly found around the neck, ears, under the armpits, and around the genitals. Usually accompanied by large amounts of black flea dirt, digested blood that has been excreted. Fleas are transmitters of both roundworm and tapeworm, so if your foster has fleas, keep an eye on their poop as well.

Treating Fleas in Young Kittens

For kittens under 8 weeks old, topical flea treatment cannot be applied. Fosters should use a flea comb to remove live fleas. Dip the comb in warm soapy water first to trap the fleas, and after to rinse them off and kill them. *Only a mild dish soap like Dawn should be used.* In severe cases, kittens can be submerged up to the neck in warm soapy water – be sure to make a dish-

NEVER put a kitten away wet.

Thoroughly towel dry you kitten after any bathing and place them with a supplemental heat source to prevent chilling.

Do not blow dry your kittens – brushing can help speed up the drying process.

soap collar around their neck first to stop fleas running onto their head.

Very young, sick, or weak kittens should not be fully bathed unless absolutely necessary, as it may send their weakened bodies into a state of shock. Chilling is one of the number one danger to young kittens who may still be unable to regulate their body temperatures.

Panleukopenia and Ringworm: Two Hardy, Highly Contagious Diseases

While most of the above ailments are often relatively minor and easily treated, two highly contagious illnesses are the driving reason we take sanitation and proper quarantine so seriously: panleukopenia and ringworm.

Contact the foster team immediately if your kitten begins showing symptoms of either disease.

Panleukopenia

Panleukopenia, “feline distemper” or “panleuk”, is a virus that infects rapidly dividing cells in cats. Panleuk is a relative of canine parvo but is more difficult to remove from the environment and more lethal. The virus is in all bodily secretions including the feces, vomit, urine, saliva, and mucus of an infected cat. The virus can last up to three years indoors at room temperature and survives freezing. It also survives treatment with such common disinfectants as alcohol and iodine. Because it is so difficult to kill, the virus is easily transmitted by “fomites” such as the hands, clothing, or shoes of anyone who comes in contact with it.

Signs and Symptoms

Signs of acute illness typically appear 2-10 days after exposure. Early signs include loss of appetite, severe lethargy, pain in the abdomen, crying, and fever up to 105°F (40.5°C). Cats often vomit frothy, yellow-stained bile repeatedly. Diarrhea may appear early in the course of the disease, but frequently comes on later and is yellow or blood streaked. In young kittens (and some older cats), the onset can be so sudden that death occurs before the caretaker realizes the kitten is ill.

Prevention

The panleukopenia virus is hardy; it can survive in carpets, cracks, and furnishings for up to three years. It is resistant to ordinary household disinfectants but can be destroyed using a

fresh 1:32 bleach solution. Most cats are exposed to panleukopenia sometime during their life, so vaccination is crucial.

Ringworm

Ringworm is not a worm but a fungal infection affecting the skin, hair, and occasionally nails of animals and people. It is in the same family as athlete's foot and is not a life-threatening condition at all. In many shelter environments, however, it can represent a critical drain on shelter time and resources, as well as an extended stay in isolation for affected animals due to the high risk of transmission.



Signs and Symptoms

The most common finding in pets with ringworm is irregularly shaped areas of hair loss. The skin in these areas will usually appear rough and scaly and often, though not always, the bald patch is round.



Prevention

Ringworm is most often spread from contact with an infected animal or a contaminated environment. It is very durable in the environment and if left untreated can persist for months in cat carriers, furniture, carpets, dust, and so on, and can infect animals housed in the contaminated environment. Keeping your foster in an isolated room, washing your hands, and changing your clothes in between handling can reduce the chance of spreading the fungus.

Kitten Veterinary Care

Overview

Your goal as a foster parent is to keep your kittens as healthy as they can be, and routine veterinary care is an important part of that. From receiving core vaccinations to medical check-ups, you should be prepared to bring your kittens into KHS about once every 2 weeks or more frequently as necessary. Caring for kittens can be a lot of work, but you are truly saving lives!

Mark Your Calendars, It's Booster Time!

Kittens are born with virtually no immune system but the antibodies they receive from their mother through nursing. These maternal antibodies gradually fade as kittens develop and the date varies kitten by kitten. Because of this variability, we administer core vaccinations every 2 weeks from the time kittens are 2 weeks old until they are 16 weeks old; the goal is to prevent an immunity gap that could leave kittens susceptible to deadly diseases like panleuk. We also administer routine anti-parasitic medications.

TYPE	WHAT DOES IT DO?	WHEN IS IT GIVEN?
FVRCP	AKA Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia – this is the vaccine that builds up immunity to those viruses. Your adult cat will also get this every 1 to 3 years.	Every 2 weeks from 4 weeks old
Pyrantel	A dewormer that kills several types of worms, but in kittens is most commonly used to treat roundworms	Every 2 weeks from 2 weeks old
Ponazuril	A dewormer predominantly used to treat coccidia	Once on intake or at 4 weeks if kittens are less than 4 weeks old at intake
Intranasal	A vaccination to help fend off Upper Respiratory Infection	Once on intake or at 2 weeks if kittens are less than 2 weeks old at intake
Flea Control	Topical treatment to kill fleas and their eggs	Once at 8 weeks old

You should expect to bring your kittens into KHS for routine boosters every 2 weeks. These appointments are generally brief and can be scheduled online at your convenience. Schedule booster appointments at www.calendly.com/khsfoster.

Vet Checks



It is a fact of fostering that sometimes animals will either come to you sick or become sick while in foster. KHS is fortunate to have a full-time veterinary staff to care for our animals. In the event your foster kitten becomes injured or ill, you should reach out to the foster team as soon as possible for guidance in setting up an exam with one of our vets.

Vet check hours are from 1-4 pm daily by appointment only; please do not show up without arranging a time first unless it's an emergency. Vet checks are scheduled directly with the foster team.

Medical Non-Emergency vs Medical Emergencies

Any medical concerns that arise with a foster animal should be reported to the foster team promptly; delay can lead to further complications, unnecessary suffering of your foster, or even death. For most medical concerns, it is appropriate to email the foster team and wait for a response. It can help to put "URGENT" or "IMPORTANT" in the email subject line to help it stand out.

Other medical concerns are much more serious and require immediate attention. To help you determine whether to email the Foster Department or utilize the emergency foster veterinary line, we have created the following chart.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>MEDICAL NON-EMERGENCIES</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <u>MEDICAL EMERGENCIES</u> </p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runny discharge from nose or eyes • Lack of appetite and/or weight loss • Lethargy and/or unusual behavior • Coughing and sneezing • Lack of bowel movement for more than 24 hours • Several bouts of vomiting or diarrhea • Large distended belly • Non-weight-bearing lameness persisting for more than 12 hours • Swollen, painful joints or a gait that appears as if the animal is “walking on eggshells” • Lameness that initially improves but does not resolve in 24 – 48 hours • Incessant scratching of self <p>If your foster animal experiences one or more of these signs, please contact the Foster Department for advice or to set up a vet check</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diarrhea for more than two days, especially if light-colored—yellow or bloody • Vomiting for 24 hours or more • Not eating for more than 12 hours • Listless behavior or dehydration (pulled skin stands up over the nape of the neck for more than 3 seconds) • Very high/very low temps (anal, above 102.8F/below 100.2F) • Any difficulty breathing • Any problem associated with systemic signs, such as lethargy, loss of appetite, weakness, and fever • Bleeding • Trauma <p>If your foster animal experiences one or more of these signs, please call the Emergency Vet Line</p> <p>If the emergency is during business hours (9 am-5:30 pm), please bring the animal to KHS and notify the Foster Department</p>

Checking for Dehydration

If you have concerns that your foster kitten is feeling unwell, a good place to start is assessing them for dehydration. Dehydration can cause kittens to feel lethargic, unwilling to eat, and generally “dumpy.”

There are two methods to check your kitten’s hydration. The first and less accurate method is to pull up the skin at the base of your kitten’s neck. When you release the skin, it should “snap” back into place within 1-2 seconds. A delay or “doughy” feeling of the skin may suggest dehydration. *Please note that this method is generally inaccurate for very young kittens and older cats, whose skin elasticity is variable.*

The second, more accurate method is to check your kitten’s gums for color and moisture. A well-hydrated kitten’s gums will be pink and moist to the touch. Pale gums or gums that feel dry or tacky to the touch suggest dehydration. You can also assess capillary refill time by pressing gently on the gums. The gums will initially turn pale and then return to normal in 1-2 seconds. If

it takes more than this for the color to return, this is a sign of poor blood circulation which suggests dehydration.

Dehydration should be addressed quickly, especially in very young kittens. Contact the foster team promptly if your kitten appears dehydrated. If additional concerns are present from the “Medical Emergency” list above, contact the team immediately or utilize the emergency line for after-hours emergencies.

Fading Kitten Syndrome and How to Respond

Overview

Fading Kitten Syndrome or sudden failure to thrive is a life-threatening emergency in which a kitten, suddenly “crashes” and begins to fade. This sometimes happens in previously healthy kittens with little to no warning. Fading kitten syndrome is most commonly a result of hypothermia (low body temperature) and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Although, other underlying issues such as congenital defects, diseases, and untreatable illnesses can cause a kitten to fade rapidly. Even with early detection and intense intervention, kittens may not survive but this fading kitten protocol could help save their life!

Symptoms of Fading Kitten Syndrome include:

- Low body temperatures, the kitten feels cold to the touch
- Extreme lethargy; not getting up, unable to stand, can’t hold head up
- Gasping for breath or open-mouth breathing
- Meowing or crying out

If your foster kitten is displaying these symptoms, you must act IMMEDIATELY.

Fading Kitten Protocol

1. Get the Kitten Warm -
 - a. Immediately wrap the kitten in a towel like a burrito, leaving only the face exposed. Do NOT take the kitten out of the towel to adjust or check on it—this lets critical heat escape.
 - b. Wrap an external heat source such as a heating pad on low or a rice pack around the kitten burrito. At this stage, the kitten cannot raise its body temperature on its own. Do NOT try to use your body heat to warm a fading kitten. Your internal temperature is lower than a kitten’s and will not help.
2. Work to Raise the Kitten’s Blood Sugar -
 - a. As soon as the kitten is warmed up, begin administering three drops of Karo syrup or sugar water (1:1 ratio) orally **every three minutes**
 - i. Use a syringe if available
 - ii. If the kitten is not swallowing or you have no syringe available, try rubbing some Karo or sugar water on its gums and tongue

3. Call the Emergency Vet Line – if there is no answer, please leave a voicemail and try calling again. Once you reach one of our vets, calmly tell us your name, the name of the kitten, and what you are currently doing to help the kitten.

It may take an hour or more for your kitten to come out of its crash and start to act normally again, so it is vital to keep at it. Know that even with perfect treatment, some fading kittens will not make it, please remember you have done everything you could and there could be underlying, untreatable illnesses that contributed to the kittens passing.

Maddie's Pet Assistant App

Maddie's Pet Assistant (or MPA) is a free app that can be downloaded onto any smartphone to provide instant support for foster parents. It was created by the veterinarians and specialists at Maddie's Fund to give skills and knowledge to foster parents while troubleshooting challenges and providing information to the foster team.

What can MPA do?

MPA is an all-around assistant! It provides information on your foster kitten as well as allows you to upload photos, biographies, and track weights. More than that, MPA asks you to complete surveys on how your foster kitten is doing and provides tailored responses based on how you answer. These responses come to you via the app and email, as well as alerting the foster office on how your kitten is progressing. MPA suggests things to do differently, how to help your kitten thrive, and when you should be reaching out to the office for additional guidance. You can even use the app to send us photos. Finally, MPA provides resources for you to save so that your skills grow as you foster and you feel more equipped to handle challenges in the future!

How does MPA work?

MPA feeds directly from our system at the shelter, so when you take a kitten home, you will automatically be sent an email providing you with login details to access your foster kitten's profile. Here you'll find helpful info such as their shelter ID number, intake date, and vaccination status. All you need to do is log in! MPA will show you notifications when you have surveys to complete, and when you have new feedback to help your foster kitten succeed. If MPA suggests that you contact the foster office, simply drop us an email and we can go from there. When it's time for your foster kitten to come back to the shelter for adoption you can upload your photos and biography into the app (or in an email to the foster team) for adoption staff to use. Once they are no longer in the system, your app refreshes ready for your next fosters!

The Home Stretch! Preparing to Return Your Kittens

The Return Process

Kittens are ready to return when they are healthy, over 8 weeks old, and weigh at least 2 lbs. Getting your kittens big and healthy enough for surgery is the endgame; it's our final step to making your kittens available for adoption and getting them into their forever homes.

Plans for surgery are made directly with the Foster Manager or Foster Lead. If your kittens are close to or at surgery weight, you should reach out via email to begin coordinating a return date. Shelter space allowing, kittens will remain on-site after surgery and go up for adoption shortly after. When shelter space is tight, we may ask that kittens return to foster for a few days post-surgery.

Returns are scheduled for the morning of surgery by no later than 8:15 am or the afternoon the day before.

Preparing for Surgery

If you are returning your kittens the morning of surgery, you are responsible for making sure they have no food or treats after midnight the night before; water should be removed by 7 am the morning of. The Foster Manager or Foster Lead might give you other instructions before return, which will be communicated to you when coordinating return. Other than that, you should enjoy your kittens! Give them plenty of playtime and snuggles before they head back to the shelter.

Adoption and Promotion

There are many ways you can help your kittens get adopted once they have returned. The first and most important thing you can do is to keep good records of your kittens and their time with you. Foster families should write up summaries about their foster animals and can include photos, what the animal likes, dislikes, behavior, and medical history. This helps us match your kitten to the right forever home!

Please DO NOT post photos or write-ups about your foster animal on social media pages except for pages specifically designated for KHS foster animals or your personal social media pages. If you receive inquiries regarding a specific animal that is currently available for adoption or general adoption questions, please encourage them to reach out to KHS directly. It's important to never speak for KHS as an organization on social media and to be mindful of what you are posting to ensure it isn't damaging to our lifesaving mission. Please reach out to the foster team if you have any specific questions regarding our social media policy.

If a friend or family member wants to adopt your foster animal, please inform them that they must still follow the same adoption protocol as the public. We do not put animals on hold for prospective adopters and you must make it clear that interest does not guarantee approval to adopt.

The First One is Usually the Hardest

Understandably, you or your family might get attached to your foster animals, but please remember that you are preparing these animals to find their forever home and that they will be loved, wherever they end up. The first-time fostering is usually the hardest to say goodbye, but you'll be able to help so many more animals in need if you allow them to be adopted by someone else!

If you and your family are absolutely sure you want to adopt your foster animal and are prepared to take on that lifetime commitment, you must inform the Foster Manager **before** returning your foster animal. You will still need to fill out an application, go through an adoption counsel with one of our staff members, and pay the adoption fee.

Congratulations on helping your kittens reach adoption and thank you for all your hard work!

Additional Resources

We have compiled some of our favorite supplemental foster materials, from written guides to video tutorials into a Google Drive folder that is accessible to any foster parent. Please check out these resources in your spare time.

You can find that Google Drive Folder here:

This manual and supplemental materials will get your foster career off to a great start, but fostering is a continual learning experience. Whether fostering your first or your fiftieth foster animal, you are constantly going to encounter new challenges and opportunities to learn and grow your foster skills. We are always happy to answer your questions, address concerns, and help you to achieve your fostering goals.

On Facebook? Join the KHS foster community at The Official Kitsap Humane Society Foster Page