



# Foster Kitten Handbook

*Caring for kittens 8 weeks of age and under*





## Thank You for Fostering

On behalf of everyone here at LA Animal Services and the center you choose to foster with, we would like to take a moment to thank you for fostering. It truly is a test of your compassion and heart to take in a foster and give them a temporary home and chance to get adopted down the road. Whether you foster underage babies or one of our adorable seniors, we thank you for helping save a life. We couldn't do it without the help of you and those in our community. We value your efforts, share in the same joys and heartaches as many of us here foster as well and we too know the ups and downs in fostering. Thank you for all that you do and take pride in knowing that you have made a difference in the life of a beautiful animal in need.

We appreciate you!! We thank you!!



## Los Angeles Animal Services Locations

### **East Valley**

14409 Vanowen St  
Van Nuys, CA 91405  
888-452-7381

### **Harbor**

957 N. Gaffey Street  
San Pedro, CA 90731  
888-452-7381

### **North Central**

3201 Lacy Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90031  
888-452-7381

### **Chesterfield Square**

1857 W 60th St  
Los Angeles, CA 90047  
888-452-7381

### **West Los Angeles**

11361 West Pico Blvd  
Los Angeles, CA 90064  
888-452-7381

### **West Valley**

20655 Plummer Street  
Chatsworth, CA 91311  
888-452-7381

## Setting Up for Bottle Babies



Bottle babies are the easiest to set up for! The most important thing to remember is that a happy kitten is a warm and dry kitten. Keeping your kittens warm is very important but even more critical for kittens being bottle fed.

## Carriers

These are just some of the examples of carriers that work for bottle babies. They are perfect because these types of carriers can sit on top of a heating pad and keep kittens warm. They can be washed and sanitized as needed.

- **Remember to always wash your carrier after each new litter/singleton.**  
Germs can spread from a used carrier to your new kittens.
- **Always make sure the door is closed correctly.**  
Kittens may be tiny but they move quickly and can climb/ push their way out of a carrier!





## Heat Sources

### Heated disks

These are the more common heating sources to keep kittens warm that have been used by fosters in our program. Heating disks come with a cover to keep pets from getting burned.

- Always make sure your disk has the cover back on after microwaving it! Disks are great because they are consistent steady heat and portable. Only a few minutes in the microwave and they are ready to go and last for about 4 hours. They are perfect for quick errands and foster checkups!



### Heating Pads

These are great because they deliver consistent heat for as long as you need it and perfect for home use.

- Look for heating pads that **DO NOT** have the auto shut off feature. You'll need a heating pad that will stay on for long periods of time without turning off.
- Place your carriers on top of the heating pad half-on half-off the pad. That way your kittens can move to the cooler or warmer side as they wish.
- Always make sure your heating pad is on a heat resistant surface!
- **Check the temperature of your carrier daily!** Place your hand directly inside your carrier to see how warm it is. Kittens that spend too much time on the cooler side are a sign that the setting on your heating pad is too high. If they spend too much time huddled together they might be too cold and you will need to raise the setting.
- **You can always leave your baby wipes next to your crate to keep them warm for use!**



## Bedding

Kittens will appreciate bedding that has texture as it does a better job of mimicking moms' fur and giving kittens comfort. Micro fleece is a great option as it is soft, has fur-like qualities and is easily washable.

- Make sure you have enough soft blankets as your kittens will go through bedding quite a bit!
- Place thinner blankets over your carrier to help keep drafts out.



## Comfort Toys

All kittens do better when they are with their mother and littermates. But when that isn't possible, small plush animals and toys that purr are some of the next best things. They help kittens transition from mom to our care. These are just some of the examples you can use.

- Plushies that purr or have a heartbeat are great in comforting kittens especially singletons.
- Microfiber socks filled with rice and tied off also make good sleeping buddies. They also work great as a quickie heating pad that's good for about an hour!





## Feeding Bottle Baby Kittens

Feeding bottle babies is one of the highlights of fostering! It's one of the most gratifying experiences when your foster kittens are happy and nursing. Thankfully bottle feeding is a lot easier with the right equipment, supplies and know-how.

### Formula

There are different choices of formula out in the market. One of the most well-known and used at most shelters is called KMR, short for Kitten Milk Replacer. KMR is easy to use and every container comes with a measuring scoop. Some things to remember are:

- Once formula has been made, it is only good for 24 hours stored in the refrigerator. Any unused portion has to be thrown out as it can cause major digestive upset to your kittens.
- Never microwave formula! Always use hot water in a mug/bowl to heat up a bottle of cold formula.
- **Formula should be fed warm at about the same temperature as kittens.**
- **Always touch the formula to test for readiness! Formula too hot will scald kittens. Too cold will chill your kittens which is critically detrimental to their health. Kittens do not like cold formula!**
- Only use hot water from the tap to make formula. Boiling or microwaving water can be too hot for your kittens to nurse from and can result in scalding your kittens' mouth or throat.
- All unused formula must be kept refrigerated. Leaving formula out can cause it to ferment and give your kitten digestive problems.
- Using a blender bottle is a great way to make clump free formula and have a container to store it as well. They have a pour spout and are totally handy!





## Bottles and Nipples

Depending on the age of your foster kittens, you will be using one of two types of nipples for your bottles. Newborn kittens would need a smaller nipple vs. older kittens that do fine with a regular nursing bottle.

- Remember that regular nipples will require you having to cut an “X” on the top in order to use them.
- You can share the same bottle and nipple with the same litter only. If you are fostering two separate kittens/litter they will each need their own bottle during feeding.
- Don’t forget to use a bottle brush to help clean bottles and nipples. Formula can get stuck inside where a sponge will not be able to reach.
- Never microwave bottles! They can damage the nipples.
- You can make a nipple more enticing by letting the nipple sit in warm water for a minute or so.





## Feeding

Bottle feeding kittens may seem intimidating but it is very easy to master. Kittens learn quickly enough to nurse from a bottle and getting a routine down will streamline caring for kittens. If the kitten latches, that's great, but it's okay if it takes a while for her to get the hang of things! Bottle feeding is an art form that improves with time, so be patient and don't give up!

- Remember to stimulate your kittens before feeding. A full bladder will make for a fussy kitten!
- Before stimulating your kitten, warm up your formula so that it is ready by the time you are done.
- **Always have a kitten on its belly for feeding.** This is how they nurse from their mother. Any other position can cause your kittens to aspirate!
- Never squeeze the bottle while feeding. Very young kittens can aspirate.
- Lay the kitten in a natural, belly-down position. Hold the kitten's head stable with your non-dominant hand. Gently slide the nipple into the kitten's mouth and invert the bottle to start the flow of formula. The kitten should roll her tongue into a U-shape and begin to swallow.
- Be sure you're holding the head and body stable to guide her. Kittens don't necessarily understand what you're trying to do, so it's up to you to hold them steady and show them.
- Take a look at your bottle and nipple, and make sure there are no issues such as a nipple that is cut too big or too small, or clumps in the formula that may be causing a blockage.
- Wrap the kitten in a small baby blanket if need be to help her feel focused and swaddled; just make sure she is still in a proper belly-down position.
- Rubbing the face with a cloth or toothbrush can simulate a mother's tongue and help them feel prepared to eat.



Here are pictures of proper holding techniques. Notice that kittens are always on their belly!



Here is a guideline to determine the proper amount and frequency of feeding. Remember that every kitten is different, and this is a guideline--not a rule book!

- As your kittens get older they will be eating more per feeding and with less frequency. If your kittens eat less during a feeding, keep in mind you will need to feed more frequently!

### 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



## Stimulating Kittens to use the Bathroom

Kittens are completely dependent on you to help them go to the bathroom. It's important that you stimulate your kittens at every feeding to make sure they go to the bathroom. This also helps in keeping their area clean as kittens can accidentally stimulate themselves if they have full bladder/bowels just by crawling.

- Feel free to use gloves when cleaning. You can always tuck used wipes in and roll the glove shut.
- Baby wipes that are warmed up are excellent to clean with. They don't irritate kitty bums!
- Make sure you have enough wipes or a large enough soft washcloth when cleaning. Sometimes kittens can really go. A lot!
- Make sure to clean up your kittens after stimulation. Urine and feces left on can cause skin to be irritated. And carriers to be dirty!
- You can use A&D cream/ointment if a kitty has an irritated bum!

### Positioning kittens for stimulation

#### 1. Holding kittens correctly

After your kitten has been fed, hold the kitten so that your non-dominant hand is under its belly and its rear is facing you. Your grip needs to be gentle, but firm enough so that the kitten can't escape from your hand.



1.



2.

#### 2. Spread a warm wet wash-cloth over your dominant hand.

You will be using this washcloth to stimulate the kitten's abdomen and anal region so that the kitten can poop. Mother cats give their babies a thorough tongue bath after each feeding, but a warm moistened washcloth can stand in for the mother cat's tongue. A light-colored cloth is preferable, so that you can also see whether the kitten has urinated or not.

### 3. Move your washcloth covered hand towards the kittens' bottom.

Using your thumb and fingers, gently massage the kitten's anal region through the cloth in circular motions. Your thumb should be doing most of the work, acting like the mother cat's tongue when she licks her kittens' bottoms to make them go.



3.



4.

### 4. Check now and then to see if the kitten has pooped or peed.

If not, keep massaging the anal area. When the kitten starts to urinate, you will feel some added warmth to the hand that is massaging the kitten's bottom. Keep massaging until the flow of urine stops, then check to see if the kitten is about to poop.

- It's normal for kittens to take a little longer to defecate than it is to urinate. The whole process shouldn't take more than a few minutes.
- **If your kitten is having diarrhea or not pooping, please check your flow chart for step-by-steps on what to do.**

### 5. Wash your hands thoroughly after massaging a kitten's anal area.

Even though you are placing a washcloth between your hand and your kitten's anus, that does not mean that urine and feces won't get on your hands. Make sure that you wash your hands with soap and warm water after you finish making a kitten poop.

- If you are using wash clothes, keep them separate from your other laundry and wash all kitten laundry in the hottest setting safe for fabric.



## Kitten Socialization

Newborn kittens are completely dependent on their mothers for everything from food and warmth all the way to comfort. Kittens are born with their eyes and ears closed and won't begin to open until about 10 days after birth. This is still a great time to start socializing your kittens. Kittens take comfort in their mother's purring and warmth. The best way to mimic that is by handling your kittens as soon as you get them.

- Take time after feeding to handle your kittens' everyday even if they still haven't opened their eyes. Their sense of smell is strong and they can start learning your scent. Imagine your kittens finally being able to see you after being handled and comforted by you and recognizing your scent!
- You can use a soft bristle toothbrush that mimics mom's tongue to groom your kittens just like she would.
- Use a toy that purrs while you handle your kittens for socializing. It mimics mom which is comforting to your kittens.
- Handling your kittens gets them used to being handled by people from an early age.
- Kittens can already purr at this age! Handling them early and often makes your kittens more docile and sweet. It also makes them easier to comfort when they are fussy because they will recognize you!
- This is the best time to get them used to being wrapped in a blanket when needing comfort. Otherwise known as the Purrito!





## Kitten Growth Charts

Kittens develop rapidly from one week to the next which is why socializing kittens is very important. Here are some of the milestones you can expect kittens to develop as they grow up.

## Kitten Growth Charts

### Week 1:

#### Physical Development

- Rely on sense of touch, smell and temperature to navigate the world.
- Unable to regulate own body temperature for a few weeks.
- Licking by their mother keeps kittens warm and stimulates their digestion and elimination.
- Double their birth weights in the first week; undergo rapid growth - equivalent of several months for human babies.

#### Behavioral Development

- Able to move towards warmth right after birth; do not do much socially but need the warmth of their mother and siblings.
- Able to identify their mother with pinpoint accuracy.
- At 2 days of age purring starts. By day 5, able to respond to sounds.



### Week 2:

#### Physical Development

- Gains in sensory and motor skills.
- Eyes open and begin to see blurry images (at 7-10 days).
- Ears unfold, improving ability to hear.
- Sense of smell improve.
- Gaining strength and motor skills.



#### Behavioral Development

- By 10 days, exhibit conditioned responses to sounds. By 2 weeks, orient to natural sounds and respond to mother's commands.
- Can recognize distinct odors and may hiss at unfamiliar scents.
- May test out wobbly legs, with caution. Beginning of independence from the mother, start of exploration.
- Formation of social relationships. Will sniff and paw a littermates.
- Majority of grooming still done by the mother, but will begin now to 3 weeks to start self-grooming and grooming of siblings.
- Development of predatory behavior.

### Week 3:

#### Physical Development

- Continued gains in sensory and motor skills, some reaching adult states.
- Better at regulating their own body temperature.
- Rudimentary walking emerges.
- Vision improves rapidly.
- Weaning begins. Decrease in initiation of nursing bouts by the mother in preparation for weaning. First teeth appear.
- Voluntary elimination starts between 3-5 weeks.



#### Behavioral Development

- Less snuggling needed with mother and littermates, leading to more independence.
- Visual orienting and following objects. Visual orientation to the nest.
- Litter box can be introduced.
- Expansion of the socialization period: social play emerges.



### Week 4:

#### Physical Development

- Adult-like orienting.
- Adult-like hearing and vision.
- Better coordination and motor skills.
- Weaning is well underway.
- Usually a dramatic growth burst; most doubled weight gain by now.
- Teeth continue to come in.
- Much better at body temperature regulation.



#### Behavioral Development

- Visual orienting and obstacle avoidance. Begin to stray farther from the nest.
- Can learn tasks with visual cues alone.
- Queen brings live prey to the nest; begins to show hunting skills.
- Solitary play declines, group play more common. Spend most awake hours playing with littermates and grooming one another.
- Begin to interact with humans and other animals in their environment on a regular basis.
- Dominance hierarchies forming.

## Week 5:

### Physical Development

- Running emerges.
- Basic skills, like hearing, vision, and locomotion, are well developed but still don't have the grace of an adult feline.
- Weaning is well underway, but nursing continues.



### Behavioral Development

- Engages in complex interactions that make up typical kitten play; hides while playing.
- Starts to kill prey.
- Able to successfully use litter box; elimination substrate preference begins to develop.
- Expansion of the socialization period: social play emerges.



## Week 6:

### Physical Development

- Time of growth and strengthening of the kitten physique, as well as refinement of sensory-motor skills.
- Capable of all the gaits exhibited by adults.
- Full control of elimination functions.
- Eating solid foods several times a day.
- Baby teeth still erupting.



### Behavioral Development

- Engages in complex interactions that make up typical kitten play due to new-found mobility and coordination. Show more adult responses to threatening visual and olfactory stimuli (e.g.: mild piloerection to cat silhouette).
- Asserting even more independence from mom, with or without littermates.
- May be chewing on everything in the house due to teething.
- Emulating daily routines of mom.
- Cope with regular handling by humans.



## Setting up for older kittens

### Transitioning kittens

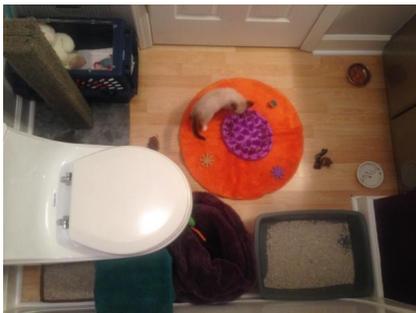
As kittens get older their needs will also change. What was once cozy and comfortable will now be constraining. Carriers will make way for pop-up crates and cages. Your kittens are going to want to be out and explore the world! Some new things to keep in mind are:

- **Make sure any new areas kittens are exposed to are safe.**  
E.g. no exposed cords, access to houseplants, places they can crawl into.
- **Kittens that are learning to eat gruel will still need to be supplemented with bottle feedings until they are eating well on their own.**
- **Kittens will start pooping on their own once they start to eat solids well.**  
They might still need to be stimulated but care should be taken to place them in litter boxes after feeding to start litter box training.
- **Socialize!** Play time is very important and now is the time to really play with your kittens and get them used to new sounds around the house and being handled.
- **Never leave your kittens to have full reign of your house when you are not supervising them!** Kittens can get into trouble and hide in what seems impossible to fit into!

### Cage and pop-up crate setup

At this stage your kittens will no longer be content in a carrier and will be cramped. They are ready to explore the world one wobbly step at a time. A lot of changes begin to happen as they transition to becoming more independent kittens. Regular and pop-up crates are perfect at this age because it gives your kittens freedom to grow while keeping them safe. Here are a few examples of what can work for you. Bathrooms also work well too if you can kitten proof them! Feel free to get creative!

- You can still keep the heating pad on for these kittens by placing it outside of the crate underneath where you will place their bedding. At this age they are better at regulating their body temperature so the heating pad can be set at a lower setting. Your kittens will appreciate a warm bed to snuggle up in after a play romp!
- Lining the area with puppy pads/ towels by the water/food bowls and the rest in the newspaper makes cleanup easier.





## Litter and Trays

- You can use cardboard trays from canned goods lined with newspaper as litter pans. Easy and disposable!
- **Never use clumping litter with kittens!** They are learning to use the litter box and can eat litter. Clumping litter is dangerous if ingested. Regular non-clumping is preferred.
- **Go easy on the amount of litter in the pan.** Kittens are still learning to use litter and will likely be kicking most of it out or playing in it if there is too much. Less is more!



## Feeding bowls

Kittens will be transiting between bottle-feeding to solid food at this stage too. Introducing kitty gruel, kibble and water in the right bowls will make clean up and feeding easier.

- Look for shallow bowls. Rimmed bowls are perfect because kittens can't tip them over.
- Line the bottom with newspaper, towels or a puppy pad for easy clean up after eating.
- Remember to place your kittens around the litter box after eating. Most likely they will have to go potty.





## Transitional Feeding

Kittens will begin to chew the nipple a lot at some point during feeding. They take the bottle well but seem restless during feeding as if looking for something more. Your kittens are old enough at around 4-5 weeks to start introducing solid foods and transitioning. Every kitten is different, so use your judgment to determine the best way to introduce this new food to the kitten. Some kittens benefit from having the wet food blended with formula in a smoothie shaker, and then fed to them in a bottle so that they can discover wet food in a format they can understand. Other kittens may be able to eat successfully from a tongue depressor, or from your finger. Eventually, the kitten will slowly learn how to lap the gruel from a dish.

- Try the “new” food when kittens are hungry and therefore more willing to accept a new taste.
- **If you see any changes in the kitten's health or energy during this process, immediately step back to bottle feeding.**
- Some kittens transition quickly while others just want the bottle for a little bit longer. Each kitten is different.
- Be patient with your kittens during the process. It’s a new experience for your kittens as they try and figure it out.
- **Expect messiness!** Kittens are learning to eat and the process is not a tidy one! Feeding in a different area and lining it with newspaper will make cleanup that much easier.
- **Keep in mind that until your kittens are eating well on their own, you will still need to supplement with bottle feeding!**



### Feeding Intervals:

- Bottle baby kittens need to be fed every 2-3 hours, 3-4 hours overnight.
- Syringe gruel babies (older kittens who need help eating on their own) need to be fed every 4-5 hours, 6-7 hours overnight.
- Gruel babies (kittens who are eating on their own) need to be fed every 5-6 hours, 7-8 hours overnight.

### Food Progression:

- **0-3 weeks:** formula from bottle or oral syringe if not sucking.
- **4-5 weeks:** transition to gruel (mixture of formula/water and wet kitten food).
- **6-8 weeks:** supplement wet kitten food with kibble.



## Weaning & Litter Box Training

- At about 4-5 weeks, introduce "gruel".
- Gruel is a mixture of wet kitten food and KMR or water.
- Serve on a flat saucer.
- Shallow litter box.
- Use shredded newspapers or non-clumping cat litter.
- Kittens will be messy!
- Kittens will start learning to clean themselves.
- Expect accidents!





## Making Gruel

Kittens getting ready to transition will be starting with kitten gruel as their first solid foods. The same rule will apply to gruel as formula: once made it will be good for 24 hours kept in the refrigerator. Always make sure to use a quality canned food that is formulated for kittens.

- Make formula as usual.
- Mix in enough formula into the wet food until it is the consistency of runny oatmeal.
- Place a tablespoon or two at a time in your bowls and place your kittens around them.
- A lot of kittens will try and bite the rim of the bowls instead of placing their face in the bowls when learning to eat. Gently guide your kittens to the gruel inside the bowls.
- Add small portions at a time into the bowl while feeding. It'll make cleanup easier!
- If your kittens are not interested in gruel, try again at the next feeding when they are hungry. This will now be a consistent thing at every feeding.
- Kittens will usually be done after 10 minutes of eating. Discard any uneaten portions from the used dishes.
- Warm gruel is more easily accepted than cold so you can heat the wet food if necessary **before** adding the formula!
- Patience is key! Your kittens will get it soon enough!





## Bathing Kittens

All kittens will need baths at some point during fostering. Luckily you can start bathing kittens as soon as they drop the umbilical cord if fleas are present. The main reason for bathing is due to the fact that all flea products are not meant for kittens so young. Most products need kittens to be at least 8 weeks old. The only way we can kill fleas safely is by bathing and drowning the fleas in the shampoo. Kittens are very easy to bathe and they do get used to it especially if made into a positive experience.

- Get all your supplies ready before you begin. You don't want to have to run around with a wet kitten looking for a towel!
- Try to complete the entire bath in less than 2 minutes, as kittens can become panicked or chilled during this process.
- You can fill a large shallow bowl with warm water and shampoo for smaller kittens or just use the sink with cups of warm water on the side ready to go.
- Create a ring of soapy water around the kitten's neck. This will act as a barrier so that the fleas do not run up the body and onto the head.
- Wash the neck first, then work your way down the rest of the body, lathering with warm water and dish soap. This doesn't give fleas the chance to run up on your kitten and try to jump off onto you!
- Wash the entire body from the neck down, including between the toes, under the arms, and on the tail.
- Spot clean the head with a washcloth or a cotton round and warm, soapy water. Avoid the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.
- Rinse completely with clean, comfortably warm water.
- Immediately towel dry the kitten. It is safe to use a blow dryer with a kitten as long as it is on a low setting, is held at least 2 feet away, and is oscillating to avoid overheating. Dry the kitten completely.
- Place the kitten back into a warm environment (such as with a heating disk or warmed baby blanket.) **Kittens can easily become chilled from a bath, and it is of utmost importance that the kitten be kept warm.**
- If you are using a flea comb, now is the time to use it to pull off fleas while drying your kitten at the same time. You can leave a cup of water mixed with a drop or so of shampoo so the fleas can drown in.
- **Never dunk a kitten's head under water!**





## Bathing Supplies

Kittens can use some of the same products as human babies for bath time. Any unscented baby shampoo works well for getting rid of fleas.

- Castile soap is amazing at helping kill fleas. You can also use it diluted to make homemade baby wipes to use on your kittens!
- There are different types of flea combs available. The less space in between the bristles the better!
- **Only use Dawn dish soap if your kitten has car grease on them.** While it is the most gentle to remove grease, it will strip your kitten of their fur's natural oils if used regularly. Use baby shampoo for routine bathing.





## List of Supplies

These are some of the things you can have on hand when fostering kittens. A lot of items on the list can be purchased at discounted stores that sell items for a dollar.

- A&D cream- great for irritated bums!
- Smoothie shaker- for clump free formula
- Baby blankets- you'll go through them quickly!
- Baby shampoo
- Baby wipes
- Pet/ baby nail clippers
- Low rimmed bowls
- Toys/ plush animals
- Electrolyte solution (non-flavored)
- Flea combs
- Corrugated trays- perfect disposable litter pans. Any market will give you these for free if you just ask!
- Newspaper- great for lining your litter pans and the bottoms of crates.
- Baby jarred food- only the pure turkey/chicken/beef variety!



## Checkups and Emergency Visits

We ask that you give the first hour (8am to 9am) and last hour (4pm to 5pm) of the day to our medical staff. These tend to be the busiest hours for them as they start and finish a shelter day with adoptions and redemptions.

- Routine checkups will be every two weeks unless stated otherwise by the medical team.
- **Please make sure to have your kennel cards with you at every recheck.** This will slow your check in time if we have to search for A numbers in the system!
- Please keep in mind we may ask you to do a drop off exam if the medical team is behind. We apologize for the inconvenience!
- Please note that if kittens are very ill, the medical team will make the final decision about euthanasia. Unfortunately, fosters cannot be present.
- **If your foster is not doing well at any hour you are asked to bring it back to the shelter. If it is after hours and we do not have any medical staff, they will be sent to a hospital the shelter is contracted with. Unfortunately we cannot disclose that information with fosters.**
- **Los Angeles Animal Services cannot reimburse any foster parent for any veterinary services not provided by the shelter.**
- **In the event of a foster kitten passing away, we ask that you bring the body back to the shelter.**



## Medical Issues Common with Foster Kittens

While every shelter will do their best to send you home with happy and healthy kittens, some illnesses will not be present until days after leaving the shelter. All kittens are seen by the medical team so that they can be accessed, vaccinated, dewormed and given a flea treatment if old enough. Here is a list of the most common illnesses seen in kittens and how we treat them here at the shelter.

**Always remember to keep your fosters away from your pets until the quarantine time has passed!**

### **URI- Upper Respiratory Infections:**

Upper respiratory infections are present in a high proportion of kittens rescued from shelters and outdoors due to their decreased immunity and the high risk of exposure to bacterial and viral agents. While the common cold might not seem like a big deal to a human, these symptoms can be very dangerous for a tiny kitten, and should be addressed ASAP. Common signs are:

- Discharge from the nose and/or eyes
- Crusting of the eyes, sometimes sealed shut due to discharge
- Frequent sneezing or other respiratory noises
- Loss of appetite- if kittens can't smell most likely they also won't eat.

**Treatment consists of antibiotics and supportive care.**

Keep the eyes and nose clear of discharge by gently patting with a warm compress to soften and wipe away any crust.

You may need to assist your kittens with feeding if they are not eating well. You can try warming wet food or feeding a meat only jarred baby food to bribe them to eat. Using a tongue depressor or syringe to assist in feeding is also helpful.





## Digestive Issues

### Parasites

All kittens start the deworming regimen at about 2 weeks of age when they are about 1 pound in weight and others added as they get older. A general dewormer for the most common parasites is given at every routine checkup fosters receive from us. Depending on any symptoms or signs your kittens have we may give other types of deworming medication as well.

**Keep in mind that if your kitten has recently gotten dewormed, you may see parasites in poop or anal area. It means the dewormer has done its job and is working.**

**Do not use an OTC dewormer on fosters!**

**If you suspect parasites please bring in kittens for a checkup!**

### Common signs can be:

- **Protozoal parasites:** Diarrhea, which can tend to be mucoid and foul-smelling
- **Hookworms:** Malaise, poor weight gain, a distended abdomen, anemia, a rough hair coat, diarrhea, and blood in the stool
- **Roundworms:** Intermittent diarrhea, a distended abdomen, failure to gain weight despite ravenous appetite, possibly white, noodle like worms in the stool
- **Tape worms:** You may see no symptoms, or you may see worms resembling rice grains in the stool.





## Constipation

It's normal for some kittens to go a day or so without pooping, as their body is adjusting to changes in food, especially starting KMR at the shelter. However, if a kitten has gone more than two days without a bowel movement, you're going to want to start taking action. As long as your kittens are healthy, eating well and doing everything else normal, our medical team will ask you to:

- Make formula as usual. Then mix in 25% more water into your fresh batch of formula and feed diluted formula. This will help with adding fluid into the gut which will help with constipation.
- Try stimulating your kittens **before** and **after** feedings.
- If your kitten allows it you can also rub your kitten's belly in small circles to help with stimulating the gut.
- If after 3 days there is still no bowel movement, bring your kitten in for a checkup. We may ask that you leave your kitten for a few hours to administer an enema.





## Diarrhea

This will be the most common medical issue seen in foster kittens second only to treating URI's.

Diarrhea can have numerous causes when it comes to kittens. Diarrhea might not seem like an emergency, but it can indicate something more serious, and its side effects can quickly lead to decline or even death in young kittens if not treated.

- **Always bring kittens in for a checkup if diarrhea is present with no changes to diet or routine. Acting fast can provide quick relief and save their lives.**

### Parasites

Internal parasites such as roundworms and hookworms are common, and are typically treated with a standard dewormer. Protozoan parasites like giardia and coccidia can be quite common in kittens and will cause foul diarrhea.

### Food issues

If you're concerned about a kitten's stool, make sure it isn't an issue with the food she is eating.

- Kittens can develop diarrhea when there is a change in diet, so if you've recently started the kitten on a new formula, or are transitioning onto gruel, that may be the issue.
- Premature weaning onto wet food may also cause diarrhea, as the body may not be ready to absorb the new proteins and complex nutrients found in meat.
- If you've recently started to wean kittens and you see diarrhea for more than 2 bowel movements, scale back and put them on a simple diet of formula to see if the body just needs more time to adjust.
- **Kittens can also get diarrhea from spoiled milk. Feed your kittens and place any unused formula straight into the refrigerator. Any formula left out can quickly ferment and cause major gastric upsets! WHEN IN DOUBT TOSS IT OUT!**



## Supportive Care of Kittens with Diarrhea

Treating the cause of diarrhea is essential to ending it. But regardless of the cause, you'll also need to treat the most deadly symptom of diarrhea: dehydration.

- **Dehydration happens quickly with kittens exhibiting diarrhea, so treating it is of the utmost importance!**
- **Rather than mix the kitten's powder formula with water, you can switch to using unflavored Pedialyte instead.**

Pedialyte contains an optimal balance of glucose and electrolytes that will help rehydrate the kitten and keep the muscles and organs functioning properly. Be sure to use a flavorless product and to keep it fresh according to the label's instructions.

### **Underlying medical issues**

While parasites and bacterial infections are often the most common causes of diarrhea in neonatal kittens, any number of underlying medical issues can cause diarrhea, including inflammatory or infectious disorders, immune disorders, viruses, lymphoma, FIP, or other conditions. If the diarrhea is accompanied by other symptoms such as vomiting, blood in the stool, or a high fever, please bring the kitten immediately!

**If a kitten exhibits any severe or persistent symptoms, it will be critical to get kittens in for a checkup ASAP!**



## Panleukopenia

Feline Panleukopenia is a highly contagious viral disease of cats caused by the feline parvovirus. Kittens are most severely affected by the virus. The viruses do not infect people.

The feline parvovirus infects and kills cells that are rapidly growing and dividing, such as those in the bone marrow, intestines, and the developing fetus.

### Which cats are susceptible to Panleukopenia?

Because the virus is everywhere in the environment, virtually all kittens and cats are exposed to the virus at some point in their lives. While cats of any age may be infected with the feline parvovirus that causes it, young kittens, sick cats, and unvaccinated cats are most susceptible. It is most commonly seen in cats 3-5 months of age; death from Panleukopenia is more common at this age.

The virus has appeared in all parts of the United States and most countries of the world. Kennels, pet shops, animal shelters, unvaccinated feral cat colonies, and other areas where groups of cats are housed together appear to be the main reservoirs of FP. **During the warm months, urban areas are likely to see outbreaks of Panleukopenia because cats are more likely to come in contact with other cats.**

### How is Panleukopenia treated?

**The likelihood of recovery from Panleukopenia for infected kittens less than eight weeks old is poor.** Older cats have a greater chance of survival if adequate treatment is provided early. Since there are no medications capable of killing the virus, intensive care and treatment are critical to support the cat's health with medications and fluids until its own body and immune system can fight off the virus. Without such supportive care, up to 90% of cats with FP may die.

Treatment focuses on correcting dehydration, providing nutrients, and preventing secondary infection. Although antibiotics do not kill the virus, they are often necessary because infected cats are at a higher risk of bacterial infections because their immune systems are not fully functioning (due to the decreased white blood cells) and because bacteria from the damaged gut may enter the cat's bloodstream and cause infection.

If the cat survives for five days, its chances for recovery are greatly improved. Strict isolation from other cats is necessary to prevent spread of the virus. Other cats that may have been in contact with the infected cat, or in contact with objects or people who were in close contact with the sick cat, should be carefully monitored for any visible signs of illness. In most cases, once a cat recovers from FP, it will not infect other cats through direct contact, but some recovered cats can shed the virus in their stool and urine for up to 6 weeks.



## Zoonotic Diseases

**Zoonotic Diseases (also known as zoonoses)** are caused by infections that spread between animals and people. These are the more common ones seen at the shelter.

### Ringworm

Ringworm is among the most frequently occurring skin disorders affecting the worldwide cat population. Despite its name, it is a fungal infection having nothing at all to do with worms. And the only thing it has to do with rings is the circular area of itchy rash that typically—but not necessarily—will appear on the skin of an infected animal.

The clearest and most common clinical signs of feline ringworm include the following:

- circular areas of hair loss,
- broken and stubby hair, scaling or crusty skin,
- alterations in hair or skin color, inflamed areas of skin, excessive grooming and scratching,
- Infected claws or nail beds, and dandruff. Contact with a cat's skin. It is very similar to other fungal infections, such as athlete's foot.



**Treatment consists of oral/topical medications and isolation until a fungal test returns negative.** It can be a lengthy recovery time as fungal infections can be resistant to treatment at times.



## Scabies

Sarcoptic mange (scabies) is caused by a mite infestation. The microscopic parasites either burrow under kittens or inhibit hair follicles or oil glands in the skin. Mange can be confined to a small area or may affect the entire body. The most common sign is of course excessive scratching.

### Signs and Symptoms of Mange

If your pet has mange, you may notice these early signs and symptoms:

- **Hair Loss-** Hair loss may be widespread or patchy. Commonly affected areas include the head, ears, neck, elbows, abdomen, chest and legs.
- **Scratching-** Mange causes severe itching, triggering almost constant scratching. Scratching can worsen hair loss and may break the skin, increasing the risk of infection.
- **Skin Irritation-** You may notice red, inflamed skin.  
**More severe symptoms include:**
- **Infections-** Bacterial and fungal infections of the skin secondary to the mite problem.
- **Greasy Skin and Coat-** greasy skin and thinning coat that comes with a distinct odor.
- **Lesions-** When mites burrow into the skin, crusty sores may form.
- **Dandruff-** The condition occurs when tiny pieces of skin begin to flake away due to the condition.
- **Bumps-** tiny bumps may also be a sign of mange.
- **Thick Skin-** If not treated promptly the skin in the affected areas may thicken.
- **Poor Sleep-** Itching usually intensifies at night and can affect the quality of your pet's sleep.

**Treatment consists of oral/ topical medications and isolation until cleared.**





## HOW TO CLEAN/ DISINFECT

In the event that your fosters become ill or have something contagious, these are steps you can take to clean your foster equipment and make sure everything is disinfected. Mixing bleach at a 1:10 dilution with water is one of the sure ways to sanitize your foster kitten equipment.

- **WEAR GLOVES!!**
- Put kittens in a crate or disinfected holding area. Back up crate is perfect or even a cleared out shower stall or bathtub is fine.
- Throw away disposable items
- Put bleachable items like bedding in a garbage bag or bin to be soaked in 1:10 bleach solution for 10 minutes, then washed/dried on your hottest setting
- Vacuum thoroughly if needed. Wipe vacuum down with bleach dilution.
- Every surface must be clean and free of debris in order to be effectively disinfected.
- Mop hard surfaces with 1:10 bleach, and keep them wet for 10 minutes to kill. Test whatever you're using on your floor to make sure you're not going to ruin your floor.
- Dump the litter and disinfect litter boxes (if not using disposable boxes) when you're doing your floor mopping.
- Disinfect any plastic beds, bowls and plastic toys.
- After 10 minutes, rinse the floor and dry it so your kittens aren't exposed to any chemicals and licking it off themselves.
- Wash food/water bowls with hot water and dish soap. Keep a separate sponge for your fosters.
- Give them clean bedding, food/water bowls, litter boxes/litter, toys, new boxes to play in, etc.
- Take the garbage out.
- Wash all laundry in the hottest setting allowed.