



# **Foster Care Guide**

**Cat and Kitten Edition**



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**“JCHS strives to improve the lives of animals, alleviate their suffering, and elevate their status in society. We safeguard, rescue, shelter, heal, adopt, and advocate for animals in need, while inspiring community action and compassion on their behalf.”**

# Dear Foster Family,

Thank you for opening your heart and home to cats and kittens in need. This life-saving adventure you are about to embark on will continue to help us save thousands of lives each year. This could not be done without YOU!

This Foster Care Guide should act as an extension to the foster orientation and as a reference to you every time you begin a foster journey.

Inside you will find important information on not only how to care for foster cats and kittens, but tips on socialization, litter box training, health and wellness, and so much more! All special individualized care that needs to be given to a foster pet will be explained to you at the time you pick them up.

This guide provides you with contact information for the Foster Coordinator.

You will find helpful tips to guide you along your foster journey. There may be times when you will be asked and instructed to reference a certain page when you have a question. This will help you to learn more about caring for foster pets and ensure you are able to find any information you need to know.

We are always here to support our foster caregivers in any way that we can. We cannot thank you enough for dedicating your time, love, home, and heart to homeless animals in need.

Sincerely,

Jefferson County Humane Society Foster Team



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# General Rules and Guidelines

As a foster caregiver volunteer for the Jefferson County Humane Society, we expect you to adhere to some general guidelines. Failure to follow the guidelines will result in dismissal from the foster program.

- Foster caregivers must notify the Foster Coordinator of changes in address, telephone number, email addresses, and/or changes in foster interest and/or availability.
- Foster caregivers must not share foster emails with friends, family, coworkers, etc. Most of the animals seeking foster care are not available for adoption and should not be shared or forwarded to outside parties. Information on foster animals should remain confidential.
- Any confidential information pertaining to animals or shelter business that a foster caregiver becomes privy to in the course of being a foster caregiver should not be discussed to outside parties.
- If you are unable to continue fostering your foster pet(s) please notify the Foster Coordinator as soon as possible to schedule a time to bring your foster pet(s) back to JCHS shelter.
- If you are bitten while fostering let the Foster Coordinator know immediately.
- Foster caregivers must arrive on time for their scheduled appointments. Repeat tardiness or absence from scheduled appointments without notifying the Foster Coordinator ahead of time may result in dismissal from the foster program.
- Foster cats and kittens are not permitted to be taken outside for any reason. The only exception is when they are being transported in their secure carrier to and from JCHS.
- Our foster program is solely for animals who are in the care and ownership of the Jefferson County Humane Society. We do not use our foster homes for animals you or someone you know finds or takes into their home.

## Procedures for Pickup and Return

After responding to a post about cats or kittens in need of foster care in the Foster Facebook Group, the Foster Coordinator will schedule a pickup time with you. Keep in mind we aim to place animals in foster care as soon as possible and foster placement will be scheduled with the first available foster volunteer.

It is preferred that foster pick-ups and returns happen during the Foster Coordinator's normal working days and hours. However, other arrangements can be made if we have appropriate staffing. Pickup and return hours are between 8:30 am-5pm on weekdays, and 10am-4pm on weekends.

You will be sent home with any supplies you may need, along with information about your foster animal(s). If it is your first time picking up a foster, you will sit down with the Foster Coordinator

to review this Foster Care Guide so that any and all questions you may have can be answered for you.

When it comes time to bring your foster pet back to JCHS, make sure you prepare yourself and your family for the day your foster pet will be ready to stay at the shelter. Sometimes with young kittens you may bring them in for a weight check and we will find that they have reached a weight of 2 pounds. That means they will be ready to stay at the shelter if we have the cage space. Once kittens reach the 2 pound weight mark they are ready to be placed for adoption. Always come to your wellness appointments prepared that your foster pet may be ready to stay at the shelter if we have not already determined an exact return date.

Stay in contact with the Foster Coordinator and never hesitate to reach out with questions or concerns.



## Preparing For Your Foster

Before you bring your foster pet home, make sure you have a suitable place for them to stay. Bathrooms and spare rooms are ideal and work very well. The use of a large roomy crate is acceptable for smaller kittens, but they will eventually need a larger space as they grow.

Double check that all windows in your foster room are securely closed and that all electrical outlets and loose wires have been blocked to keep your foster pet safe. Housing your foster animals in rooms with carpet is not ideal as you cannot easily clean or disinfect carpet once it becomes soiled.

If you are housing your foster pet in a bathroom, make sure the toilet lid is closed to keep your foster from taking an unexpected swim! Foster rooms should have a way to control the temperature to avoid your foster pet from becoming too cold or too warm.

JCHS feeds Purina Cat Chow to all adult cats and Purina Kitten Chow to all kittens in our care. They should remain on this brand to avoid digestive upset when your foster pet comes back to the shelter. The only time you should feed a different brand of food is when your foster animal requires a specific diet for a medical condition. Each time you pick up a foster animal, any dietary needs will be explained to you if applicable.

Royal Canin Baby Cat dry and canned food is preferable to be fed to small kittens who are beginning the transition process to dry food and to nursing mom cats. This food provides extra nutrients and it is much easier for young kittens to eat. Baby Cat canned food mixes very well with formula and warm water for kittens transitioning onto solid foods. However, any wet kitten food brand is better than none.

We will supply you with supplies to care for your foster pet. Keep in mind that some items will not always be available at the shelter. Below are general supplies you will need for fostering cats and kittens:

- 🐾 Litter box
- 🐾 Non-clumping litter
- 🐾 Food and water bowls
- 🐾 Carrier for transporting
- 🐾 Large wire crate for housing (if necessary)
- 🐾 Toys, bedding, treats
- 🐾 Heating source (for kittens under 5 weeks old)
- 🐾 Formula, bottle, syringes (newborns and weaning kittens)

Avoid using plastic bowls for water and food as they are incredibly difficult to disinfect between fosters. Stainless steel, ceramic, and glass bowls are recommended as they are sturdier and can be easily disinfected between foster animals.

## Bringing Your Foster Home

Being in a new environment is stressful for most cats and some kittens. A normal reaction may be to hide. It is important to house your foster cats and kittens in a room that prevents them from hiding in small, hard to reach places. This is why spare rooms and bathrooms are ideal. Confinement prevents your foster cat or kittens from becoming too overwhelmed and keeps them safe. Scared cats can harm themselves by trying to wedge into small spaces like under ovens, radiators, heaters, etc. It is much safer to keep your foster cats/kittens confined to one “cat-proof” room.

When you arrive home with your foster pet, open up their carrier and allow them to decide if they want to explore right away or hang out in their carrier for a little while. Even the most social cats may need time to adjust. It is not abnormal for an adult cat to spend a few hours in their carrier before they are comfortable enough to explore. Never try to pull foster cats or kittens out of their carriers or hiding spots. You can try to encourage your foster to come out of their hiding spot by using food, treats, or toys. If a foster cat does not come out with some encouragement, let them be. When your foster is ready, they will venture out on their own. Often, cats will first come out of hiding when no one is around.

Allow shy and fearful foster pets to slowly get used to you. Sit in their room and quietly read a book, talk to them in a quiet voice, or use a wand toy to tempt the cat to come out and play. While a foster is adjusting, refrain from too much petting. This can reinforce their fear. Patience is key in allowing a foster to feel safe and comfortable. It is perfectly normal for cats, especially shy and fearful ones, to not have a huge appetite while adjusting to a new environment. It is important to not overwhelm them by offering many different types of food and treats. This can be an aversive and make your foster pet even less interested in eating.

Foster cats and kittens should be kept separate from your resident pets. This will minimize stress on foster pets, resident pets, and help prevent the spread of illness should your foster cat or kitten become ill. We cannot stress the importance of housing foster animals separately from resident animals enough. Jefferson County Humane Society is not responsible for any illness your resident pets may contract from a foster pet if you allow them to interact with each other and do not practice safe handling and proper hygiene.

**Foster cats and kittens should always be kept inside. Even if you have a fenced in yard and think you can keep them safe. Letting foster cats and kittens outside, or taking them outside to hold them will result in dismissal from the foster program.**

## Safeguarding Fosters and Resident Pets

It is so incredibly important to understand the reason we want foster animals and resident pets to stay separated from each other. Remember that fostering animals is to help them heal, recover, or prepare for an adoptive home and introducing them to resident animals hinders the goal of the foster experience.

The majority of the animals we place in foster care are young orphaned kittens of all ages that have come into the shelter and have been born and/or living outside. This means there is no medical history on them and we do not know what they may have been exposed to. Parasites, ringworm, upper respiratory infection, feline infectious peritonitis, panleukopenia, and feline leukemia are a few examples of illnesses that your resident cats can contract by letting them come in contact with foster kittens. Some of these illnesses are incredibly serious and can affect the life of your resident cat(s).

Your resident animals should always be up to date on vaccinations prior to fostering animals.

Anytime fosters enter your home, they must be housed separately from your resident animals for at least **14 DAYS**. Most illnesses have a 14 day incubation period. However, there are still risks involved with introducing foster and resident pets after the 14 day period. Some illnesses have a longer incubation period. A good example of this is ringworm and feline leukemia (FeLV). Kittens in foster care are too young to be tested for FeLV. We will not know ahead of time if they are FeLV positive. Even then, FeLV is a very complex disease and testing is complicated. Foster animals and resident pets should never share food and water bowls or litter boxes.

**Foster care best practice is to keep your resident pets and foster animals completely separate throughout the duration of foster care.**

Adult foster cats should never be introduced to resident adult cats at any time. Introductions between adult cats are complex and we do not want to induce stress to resident or foster cats. Since fostering is temporary, there is no need to introduce adult cats to each other. Most foster care time is between 1-3 weeks which is not enough time to appropriately introduce adult cats.

All foster cats and kittens must never be introduced to resident dogs. This could turn disastrous very quickly resulting in injury or death to small kittens and may not be a positive experience for either animal.

After reading this section and the rest of this foster care guide, you should understand that introductions between foster and resident pets are just not necessary and only cause more work on your behalf. Let's keep all the animals happy and safe by housing them separately. After all foster care is temporary and there is no need to try to rush introductions or cause stress to kittens who need to get big and healthy.

## Caring for Different Life Stages of Kittens

Young kittens make up the majority of our foster care needs. They are the most vulnerable animals who enter our shelter and they rely on foster placement to keep them healthy, happy, and socialized. Kitten foster homes care for young kittens that range in age from newborns up to 8 weeks of age and older. The following section outlines the various age groups of kittens and the specific care needed for those age groups.



# Caring for Newborn Kittens 0-3 weeks old

Fostering newborns requires a lot of dedication and is a richly rewarding experience. Newborn fosters require 24/7 care as they are orphans who have been found without a mother. Before fostering newborn kittens, you are required to attend a newborn training class. Newborn care requires time, patience, and commitment. You will need to wake up throughout the night to care for them. By fostering such tiny kittens, you get to play a crucial role in helping them grow into confident, healthy, and happy cats who will go on to be a loyal companion and best friend for an adoptive family.

It is important to note that young kittens are incredibly fragile. Sometimes no matter how well you take care of them, some may not survive. As difficult as it is to lose a foster pet, you should never blame yourself. In the unfortunate event that your foster kitten passes away, please call the Foster Coordinator as soon as possible.

## Growth and Development

Kittens are born with their eyes and ears closed. They cannot regulate their body temperature, hear, or see upon birth. Some orphan newborns may still have their umbilical cord attached. It will fall off on its own when the kitten is between 4-5 days old. You should never remove the umbilical cord yourself as this can result in injury or infection for the kitten. Their eyes will start to open between 7-10 days and their ears will start to open around 2 weeks of age. You should never try to pry their eyes open, they will open naturally on their own.

Kittens are born with their sense of smell intact and they can begin purring at two days old. By two weeks old, their vision is still developing but they can see a little. At three weeks, their incisors begin emerging (tiny teeth located in the front of the mouth), they can hear, their vision has improved, and they will begin to spend more time exploring the world around them.

## Feeding

Newborns need to be fed every 2-3 hours throughout the day and night. Feedings should be spread out evenly to ensure blood sugar levels do not drop. You should only feed them Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR). Never feed a newborn kitten anything other than their formula. (No cow's milk!) When mixing formula, make sure to closely follow the instructions. It is best to only make enough formula per feeding. Formula must be kept refrigerated and should never be left out at room temperature. Stale formula can cause bacterial infections which can be fatal to small kittens.

If you do have leftover reconstituted formula, it can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours. However, you should not re-warm formula more than once. **You must never feed cold formula or microwave bottles.** Feeding cold formula causes the kittens body temperature to drop and can result in hypothermia. Microwaving bottles can result in hot spots in the formula resulting which can easily burn a small kitten.

Only clean nipples and bottles should be used to feed your newborn kitten fosters. Make sure to test the nipple prior to feeding to make sure the formula drips out slowly. Bottles must be washed with warm soapy water in between feedings to ensure no formula or residue is left inside the bottle which can easily get stale and cause your foster kittens to become ill.

Kittens should be weighed before and after each feeding. When the kitten's belly is full, stop feeding. You want their bellies to feel full but not bloated. The kittens will often tell you themselves when they are full, as they will refuse to drink any more formula. See the kitten feeding chart on **page 14** for appropriate amounts of food to feed per body weight. Keep in mind that this chart should only be used as a general guide. Every kitten is an individual and the feeding amounts can and will vary with each kitten.

Newborns need to be kept on a heating source (more on this to come), and you will want to make sure that your foster kittens are warm before feeding. This will ensure their digestive systems work properly. Never feed a cold kitten. Even if the kitten has not eaten, feeding a cold kitten does more harm than good. Wait until their body temperature has warmed up before attempting to feed. Placing the kitten on a heating source for 30 minutes to 1 hour will warm their body temperature enough for you to safely feed them.

Kittens must always be fed on their stomach in an upright position. This will prevent them from inhaling the formula into their lungs which can cause them to aspirate. **Never feed a kitten on their back.** If you notice formula coming out of your kittens' nose, stop feeding. Kittens can typically clear fluid from their lungs easily. Wait until they have cleared the liquid from their lungs before feeding again. If the kitten constantly has milk come out of their nose when feeding, the nipple flow may be too strong for them. Call the Foster Coordinator to discuss alternate nipple options. If you think your kitten has aspirated, and is showing signs of severe breathing difficulties, please call us immediately.

Bottles should not be squeezed while feeding as this will cause formula to enter the lungs.

**Correct way to bottle feed:**



**Incorrect way to bottle feed:**



## Elimination

Newborns up to 3 weeks old are unable to eliminate on their own. When newborn kittens have their mom, they take care of helping their kittens eliminate properly. For orphan newborns, they rely on their foster caregiver to assist with making sure they eliminate properly. You will need to manually stimulate your kitten in order for them to eliminate. This is done by taking tissues, toilet paper, or cotton rounds, and gently massaging the anogenital area in a circular motion to allow the kitten to urinate and defecate. Check out Kitten Lady's video for a demonstration: [www.kittenlady.org/stimulating](http://www.kittenlady.org/stimulating).

Kittens should be stimulated before and after each feeding. If you notice urine or feces on the kittens bedding, this is due to them moving around on the blankets and stimulating themselves. You should not rely on that as a way for your foster kittens to eliminate.

Newborn kittens should defecate every 1-2 days. If the kitten goes longer than two days without defecating, but they are still eating, urinating, and acting normal, continue to monitor them. Keep an eye on them for any signs of abnormality like a bloated and hard stomach (not caused right after eating), lethargy, or very dry and brittle feces.

## Heating

Newborn kittens are not able to regulate their body temperature. It is important that newborn kittens up until the age of 5 weeks have a source of heat to keep them warm and prevent hypothermia. The normal body temperature for a newborn kitten is between 100-102.5°F. Heating disks (which may be available at the shelter) are wonderful for keeping your newborn fosters nice and warm. Always make sure that the heating source is covered with bedding to prevent burns. It is important to make sure the kittens have enough room to move away from the heat source if they become too warm.

The use of plug-in heating pads is not recommended. They typically cover too much space leaving the kittens without a way to escape the heat if they become too warm and they only work when plugged in. Which means anytime you travel to the shelter with the kittens, or to work, they will not have a way to stay warm. **Even if the trip is short, it is not appropriate care to leave newborn kittens without a heating source for any period of time.** Cords and wires from plug-in heating pads often intrigue kittens and can be easily chewed through or on which is a safety hazard. Burns can result if plug-in heating pads become too warm, or if wires become wet with urine. We also cannot forget that most plug-in heating pads operate on an automatic shut off system which leaves kittens without a source of heat to keep them warm.

## Housing

Newborns can be housed in large plastic storage containers (without the lid, of course!) or in larger size mesh travel carriers, or playpens with solid walls designed for housing animals. At this age, they do not need a lot of space, but the kittens should have room to move about normally. Wire crates or plastic travel carriers are not recommended as newborns can easily become stuck in the wire bars or carrier door openings resulting in severe injury or death.

Bedding must be checked at each feeding to ensure it has not become soiled with urine or feces. Wet bedding that lays on a heating source can cause burns. Soft fleece is preferred for newborn kittens to snuggle up in and keep warm.

### **Suckling**

It is natural for orphan newborns to suckle on each other or on your fingers, even after eating. This is typically harmless. However, a close eye should be kept on the siblings to make sure their skin or fur is not becoming irritated or swollen. You will need to check the kitten's genitals to make sure any suckling activity is not causing problems. Suckling that is excessive can result in scar tissue forming around the penis of a male kitten which will result in the kitten needing surgery. If the suckling is excessive and causing distress or injury to the siblings, you may need to house the kittens separately until they are older.

Providing a stuffed animal can sometimes help mimic the presence of a mother cat that the kittens can use to suckle on. This is not fool proof, but can be an aid in redirecting suckling behavior.



### **Newborn Care Tips**

- 🐾 If you notice your newborn kittens have diarrhea, try mixing in one extra part of water when making formula. If the diarrhea continues after a few meals, contact the Foster Coordinator.
- 🐾 If a newborn kitten is not defecating on a regular schedule, try offering an additional meal to increase the amount food going into their system. Adding an extra part of water to the formula can also aid in constipation relief. If the constipation continues and the kitten has become lethargic or stopped eating, call the Foster Coordinator.

- 🐾 Very small newborns may need to be fed using a syringe with a nipple attached. The Foster Coordinator will show you how to use this method and how to bottle feed appropriately when you pick up your foster kittens.
- 🐾 You should avoid bathing newborn kittens, but they can be gently wiped off with a warm cloth or baby wipes to keep them clean.
- 🐾 Newborn kittens often enjoy being stroked while they eat. Brushing the kittens with a soft bristle toothbrush while they eat mimics a mom cats' tongue and it encourages eating.
- 🐾 A bottle brush can be used to clean the inside of the bottle or you can choose to clean them in a dishwasher by placing them in the silverware rack or dishwashing basket.
- 🐾 We love Kitten Lady! Her website is full of fantastic instructional and educational videos and we encourage you to check them out. This is a link to information and videos for feeding newborn kittens: <http://www.kittenlady.org/feeding>

## 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

Chart Source: Kitten Lady

<http://www.kittenlady.org/weighing>

## Caring for Kittens 3-5 weeks of age



When kittens reach this stage they will begin the transition to becoming fully functioning little cats. This stage is when kittens learn how to eat on their own, use the litter box, and they begin to play with each other and toys. It is important to socialize the kittens to different and new toys, sounds, etc. Once the kittens reach 5 weeks of age, they can regulate their body temperature, and a heating source is no longer needed to keep their body temperature stable. The weaning process should begin between 4 ½ -5 weeks old.

### **Growth and Development**

At three weeks of age, their teeth have just begun to emerge from their gums and by four weeks their teeth will continue to develop and push through their gums. Around 4-5 weeks old when their canine teeth have emerged, we will begin the weaning process of transitioning to solid foods. When the kitten reaches 5 weeks of age, their premolars will begin to emerge, and they should have a basic understanding of eating a gruel/slurry mixture of canned food and formula while being introduced to more solid foods.

### **Feeding**

At three weeks of age, kittens will still be receiving their meals through a bottle and will need fed every 3-4 hours. Weaning should not start until the kittens reach 4 ½ -5 weeks of age. Starting the weaning process too early can result in kittens not receiving the proper or necessary nutrients and calories needed to remain healthy and strong.

Once the kittens reach the weaning stage, you will want to begin transitioning them to eating a gruel/slurry mixture of canned kitten food and formula. You will need to continue supplementing with bottle feeding to ensure proper calorie intake.

The gruel/slurry should be served in a shallow dish. It may take some time for kittens to catch on to weaning, especially if they are a solo kitten. Using a tongue depressor, or tip of your finger can help them learn how to eat on their own. Some kittens will catch on more quickly than others. You may need to place some of the gruel on the kittens' lips or gently inside of their mouth to get them to taste their yummy new meal.

After the kittens are eating the formula and canned food gruel confidentially for a week or so, you can begin to wean them onto a gruel/slurry made of warm water and canned food by slowly phasing out the formula and then gradually phasing out the watered down canned food. This will result in the kittens being able to eat regular paté canned food on their own. Fresh water should begin to be offered at 5 weeks of age and by 6 weeks of age, dry kitten food can start to be offered.

Leftover gruel/slurry needs discarded once the kittens have finished eating. You can store opened canned food in the refrigerator for up to 48 hours, if it has not already been mixed into a slurry or gruel mixture.

## **Housing**

At four weeks of age, kittens can be kept in a roomy crate or moved into a spare bedroom or bathroom. Bathrooms are ideal at this age as weaning can be messy and you will begin litter box training at this stage. If you house the kittens in a bedroom, make sure to “kitten-proof” the room to prevent the kittens from injuring themselves on wires or electrical outlets.

Once weaning begins, you may be giving lots of baths and wipe downs to keep the kittens clean. It is important to make sure food that the kittens get on themselves is cleaned off in a timely manner. This prevents the kittens from becoming chilled and keeps their fur and skin from becoming irritated which can result in dermatitis and hair loss.

Always make sure kittens are fully dry before you leave them alone. If the kittens are under 5 weeks of age, a heating source must be made available to them. Damp kittens should never be placed directly on a heating source as this will cause burns.

You will need to clean the kitten’s living area daily and anytime they make a mess. Litterboxes should be cleaned multiple times a day after the kittens eliminate.

## **Litter Box Training**

Once the kittens reach 4 weeks of age, they will no longer need stimulated in order to eliminate. Keep in mind, some kittens around 3 ½ weeks of age may be ready to start some litter box training but will still need some help eliminating. You should provide a litter box with low sides for the kittens to easily climb in and out of. Old baking sheets work well, and we usually have kitten litter boxes available at the shelter. Non-clumping litter should be used as often, kittens will sometimes explore the litter by trying to eat it. Clumping litter is toxic to kittens if ingested and should not be used. Keep the litter box away from food and water bowls and be sure to keep it clean. Place kittens inside the litter box after meals to encourage elimination.

Although litter box training comes natural to cats due to their natural instinct to cover their scent after eliminating, it is not uncommon for young kittens to have accidents. If you find feces outside of the litter box, pick it up and place it inside the litter box. This can help encourage litter box usage, as the kittens will recognize their scent in the litterbox.

### **Litter Box Success Tips and Reminders:**

- 🐾 Encourage litter box training by using a cotton ball to stimulate the kittens. Once the cotton ball is soaked with urine, place it in the litter box. The scent of the kitten's urine in the litter box will aid in litter box training.
- 🐾 Shallow cake and baking pans work as excellent litter boxes for small kittens. Remember, they will need to maneuver in and out of the box. If the sides are too high, the kitten will not be able to access the litter box to eliminate.
- 🐾 Clumping litter can be harmful to kittens if ingested. Wait until your kittens are 8 weeks of age or older before using clumping litter.
- 🐾 Cat/Kitten attract is a substrate that can be used to help aid in litter box training. Sometimes we have some available at the shelter, but you will most likely need to purchase some on your own if you would like to use it. The substance attracts cats/kittens to the litterbox. There are some brands that come in a litter type consistency and others that look like catnip that you sprinkle in the litter box.
- 🐾 Be patient! Your foster kittens will eventually understand the concept. If you are still struggling after a few weeks, give the Foster Coordinator a call for more tips and ideas.



## Caring for Kittens: 6-8+ weeks old



Kittens who are between 6-8 weeks old should be fully weaned and litter box trained. Kittens in this age group are very active and always ready to play! Playing and socializing with the kittens at this stage is still very important. You should spend plenty of time with your foster kittens to ensure they become well socialized with people, toys, etc. See the socializing your foster cat and kitten section on **page 23** of this guide for helpful tips and advice for socializing your foster kittens.

### **Growth and Development**

By six weeks of age, kittens have reached their peak of early development and should be fully weaned onto solid foods. Their molars will start coming in and they will soon be ready to find adoptive homes.

### **Feeding**

In this stage, kittens should be eating dry and canned food regularly. They must always have dry food and fresh water available. Canned food will need to be fed 2-3 times a day.

### **Housing**

Ideal and appropriate housing is in a spare room or bathroom that has been “kitten proofed” to keep the kittens safe. Offer plenty of toys and enrichment for the kittens to explore and play with. Make sure to continue cleaning the litter box daily and remove any soiled bedding and toys as needed. Kittens in this age group are able to regulate their body temperature and a heating source is not needed. However, you should still make sure the kittens are thoroughly dried if you must bathe them to prevent them from becoming chilled.

# Foster Care for Nursing Moms



Mom cats with kittens do a very good job at taking care of the kittens and themselves. For the most part, you will allow mom to “do all the work” while you monitor for signs of trouble. Mom cats with kittens need kept in a quiet space away from resident pets where they can focus on taking care of their kittens in a calm and quiet setting.

## **Bringing Them Home**

Once home, mom will need some time to adjust to her new surroundings. Make sure there is a nesting area set up in the room where they will be staying to allow mom to nurse her kittens. You can add a heating disk to the nesting area if you would like. However, only add extra warmth to half of the nesting area if you choose to do so to avoid over heating the kittens and mom. For moms with newborn kittens, keep handling to a minimum for the first two weeks. Provide mom with fresh food, water, and a clean litter box. You should check on the kittens a few times a day to make sure they are all nursing. If mom becomes overly stressed from constant handling of herself or her kittens, this could cause her to stop nursing her babies. Provide mom with regular meals, fresh water, and a clean litterbox. It is normal for nursing mom cats to appear thin and be slightly underweight. Her body is working hard taking care of her kittens. She will begin to gain weight once her kittens start the weaning process. Mom cats can be fed kitten food to help them gain weight.

## **Caring for Nursing Kittens**

Young kittens will rely on their mom for constant warmth and nutrition. Remember young kittens are not able to regulate their body temperature. Mom will essentially do all of the work associated with feeding, grooming, and caring for her kittens.

When kittens are first born, the first milk that mom produces is called colostrum. This milk contains antibodies to help protect the kittens from illness and is very important to the kitten’s cardiovascular and immune systems. Kittens only benefit from the colostrum for a short time after birth, but it is very important newborn kittens receive this milk.

You will want to make sure all the kittens are nursing. You can safely do this without causing too much stress to the mom cat by wearing disposable gloves and gently picking up each kitten to feel for round bellies full of milk. This should be done twice a day to ensure all the kittens are nursing.

If you feel a flat or concave belly, that means the kitten is not nursing and you will need to bottle feed that kitten (See the newborn care section of this guide for how to care for a kitten needing bottle fed). If the kitten will not eat, you need to call the Foster Coordinator.

Mom will groom and clean up after her kittens. She will also play a vital role in teaching the kittens proper social cues and behavior. Once the kittens reach about 4-5 weeks old, you should begin to start the weaning process. Start by offering the kittens a mixture of canned food and warm water in a shallow bowl. By observing their mom eat her food, the kittens will learn to eat on their own quickly. However, it will be normal for them to continue to nurse (or try to nurse) off their mom up until they are about eight weeks old.

### **Supplemental Care for Nursing Kittens**

For large litters of five or more kittens, you may need to help mom care for the kittens. Supplemental feeding with a bottle may be needed one to three times a day. If you need to provide supplemental feeding to kittens who are still nursing, feed one third of the suggested feeding amount on the Kitten Weight and Feeding Chart on **page 14**. Supplemental feeding will need done until the kittens are weaned. If the kittens are not nursing from mom, replacement feeding will need to take place.

### **Replacement Feeding**

If the mom cat has stopped nursing too soon, is not producing milk, or her milk has become infected, you will need to bottle feed the kittens until they are weaned. The kittens should remain with their mom for warmth, grooming, and to develop proper social skills, but you will need to feed the kittens at regular intervals. Feeding amounts can be found on the Kitten Weight and Feeding Chart on **page 14**.

### **Problem Signs**

Young kittens, especially those from 0-2 weeks of age should spend about 90% of their time sleeping and eating. If you notice the kittens are constantly crying during or after eating this could be a sign that they are becoming ill, or that mom's milk has become infected. You need to call the Foster Coordinator immediately as newborn kittens can die within 24 hours from infections or lack of nutrition.

### **Possible Issues with Mom Cats**

**Maternal Neglect:** Some cats lack maternal instincts or sometimes nature tells mom to stop caring for her kittens because they are sick or weak. Environmental stress plays a huge role in maternal neglect. It is important to keep mom and her kittens in a private room away from loud noises and other pets. If you notice the mom cat avoiding her kittens by ignoring cries and if she stops feeding and grooming them, call the Foster Coordinator **immediately**.

**Maternal Aggression:** As mom protects her kittens, it is normal for her to show signs of aggression towards humans or other animals. If you notice severe aggression towards yourself as

the foster caregiver or you notice mom behaving aggressively towards her kittens, please call the Foster Coordinator **immediately**.

# Kitten Growth and Development Visual

## TEENY TINIES The tiniest, most vulnerable kittens require gentle and frequent care.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>NEWBORN</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• umbilical cord attached, eyes closed, ears folded</li> <li>• can't regulate body temp.</li> </ul>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>1 WEEK</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eyes closed, ears folded, no umbilical cord</li> <li>• eyes open at 8-12 days</li> </ul>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>2 WEEKS</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eyes completely open, blue color</li> <li>• wobbly on their feet</li> </ul>
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## TEENY WEANIES As kittens age, you'll help them reach important developmental milestones.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>3 WEEKS</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• incisors emerging, ears unfolded</li> <li>• discovering litterbox</li> </ul>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>4 WEEKS</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• canines emerging</li> <li>• vision improving; walking confidently</li> </ul>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>5 WEEKS</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• premolars emerging</li> <li>• weaning slowly onto wet kitten food</li> </ul>
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## BIG KIDS CLUB These social, independent, and coordinated kittens are almost ready for adoption.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>6 WEEKS</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all milk (deciduous) teeth have emerged</li> <li>• eating confidently</li> </ul>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>7 WEEKS</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transitioning to adult eye color</li> <li>• coordinated and playful</li> </ul>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>8 WEEKS</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• once 2 pounds, kittens can be spayed/neutered and placed in their forever home!</li> </ul>
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Source: [kittenlady.org/aging](http://kittenlady.org/aging)

## Caring for Adult Cat Fosters

Adult cats will need time to adjust to their new surroundings. They should always be housed separately from resident pets and introductions to resident pets are not permitted. We feed all adult cats Purina Cat Chow; unless otherwise directed by the Foster Coordinator.

The adult cats that we place in foster care are either recovering from an illness, operation, or injury, or those who are shy, fearful, or have other behavior concerns that we would like to place in foster care to learn more about who they are and help them become confident around people, or work on modifying their behavior. Or if they just need a break from the kennel.

If you foster an adult cat who we are placing in foster care for behavior reasons, you must take a proactive approach to helping your foster cat. Individual and detailed instructions will be provided to you on a case by case basis. This ensures that each cat placed in a foster home for behavior reasons will receive individual plans designed to set them up for success.

If you foster an adult cat who is recovering from an illness, injury, or operation, you will be given detailed and specific instructions tailored to the needs of the cat based on what they are recovering from. You will more than likely have to administer medication when taking home a cat recovering from an illness, operation, or injury. Please make sure that is something you are comfortable with before committing to fostering this type of animal. The Foster Coordinator can and will show you how to properly administer all medications.

You will need to clean their litter box one to two times a day and provide fresh food and water. Make sure to spend time with your adult cat foster, you will learn so much about their personality and behavior in a home that we can and will use to provide potential adopters with accurate information on your foster cats personality.



# Socializing Foster Cats and Kittens

Socialization is critical to kittens and they will need multiple short socialization sessions daily as well as playtime to help them learn to enjoy being around people. You will want to desensitize your foster kittens to new stimulus. Carriers, new people, different toys, the sounds of a television and vacuum cleaner, etc. All these things will help you develop confident and social kittens which will help them find forever homes more quickly.

Kittens and adult cats need to be adjusted to their surroundings before you begin socialization and play sessions. If you are fostering an outgoing adult cat or kitten, then you can pet and play with them all you want! For shy and fearful cats and kittens, you will need to move much slower.

For shy and fearful cats and kittens, keep socialization sessions short. Multiple 3-5 minute sessions a day are much better than one long session. This will help them to build confidence and give them many quick and positive encounters with humans. If a foster cat or kitten displays any sign of being uncomfortable: hissing, swatting, swooshing tail, ears back, ruffling of the fur, please stop the session. This means you need to proceed more slowly. If you continue to attempt petting or play when a foster kitten or cat displays this behavior you reinforce their fear. If you take home a fearful or shy cat or kitten, the Foster Coordinator will give you further instructions for socialization depending on the cat or kitten and their individual needs.

Once your foster cat or kitten is comfortable with you, introduce them to friends and family. Do this one person at a time to avoid overwhelming them. Make sure your visitors know how to approach your foster cat or kittens to keep the visits positive and fun.

Kittens should never be allowed to play with your hands as this behavior teaches them that mouthing, biting, swatting, and clawing at hands is acceptable. Make sure your kittens are redirected to playing with toys, not hands.

**Remember:** Not all kittens will grow into cats that enjoy being held and cuddled. That is ok! The same applies to adult cats. Many people enjoy having independent cats as pets. Do not force your foster cat or kitten to be held if they do not enjoy it.



## Socialization Success Tips and Reminders:

- 🐾 Always pair food with your presence, even if you are not touching or interacting with your foster pet at that time. Feeding canned food from a tongue depressor or spoon can help develop a positive association for the cat or kitten with your presence.
- 🐾 Paper bags and cardboard boxes are safe items that can be used for your foster pets to explore and hide in. Always offer shy or fearful cats/kittens a safe place to hide.
- 🐾 Do not allow your foster cats or kittens to play with your hands or feet! By allowing them to play with your hands and feet encourages play biting which can be very painful and cause a bite to happen.
- 🐾 Allow your foster pets to explore different toys and treats.
- 🐾 Teach fosters kittens to enjoy having their paws handled to make nail trims easier for their adoptive families as they grow into adult cats.
- 🐾 Acclimate foster cats and kittens to the presence of a carrier. Leave a carrier out for them to explore and leave a tasty treat and comfy blanket inside for them to lay on. This will make travelling to a vet office and back to the shelter a much more pleasant experience for the cat or kitten as they will be used to and comfortable with the carrier.
- 🐾 Slow and steady wins the race! Do not force any foster, especially a shy/fearful foster pet to do anything they are not comfortable with. Rushing any type of socialization can cause an adverse reaction and make your foster pet even more fearful.



# Maintaining Cat & Kitten Health

It is important to always be aware of your foster pet's health. This section outlines common health concerns that may be observed while fostering to help you gain a better understanding of them. This section will also aid in outlining when you need to call the Foster Coordinator for health concerns as well as a few other health related topics. You should know that medication will not be prescribed prophylactically or for a single case of sneezing, diarrhea, etc. All treatment is prescribed solely at the discretion of our veterinarians after an examination.

## **Zoonotic Disease**

Zoonotic diseases are those that can be transmitted from animals to humans. Although the frequency of this transmission is rare, you need to be aware of the risk and practice good hygiene after handling foster pets. Always wash your hands after cleaning litter boxes, handling feces, urine, etc. and if you are bitten or scratched by your foster animal alert the Foster Coordinator **immediately**. Those with a suppressed immune system are at a greater risk when it comes to zoonotic disease transmission. The Foster Coordinator will let you know ahead of time if your foster animal has been treated or tested positive for a zoonotic disease.

## **Diarrhea and Loose Stool**

The most common issue we see in foster cats and kittens is diarrhea. The cause of diarrhea can be a number of things (stress, diet changes, overfeeding, viruses, bacteria, parasites). If your foster animal has loose stool or diarrhea and is otherwise acting normal, eating, and drinking the best thing to do is monitor them. As much as we all wish there was a magic cure or medication for diarrhea, there is not. Diarrhea and loose stool in kittens, especially is a complex issue. Treatment, if applicable, will be determined at the discretion of our veterinarians.

Many people confuse loose stool and diarrhea. They are not the same and you should understand the difference. Refer to the fecal chart located on **page 38** of this guide to reference the different scores of stool. You will be required to give a fecal score number if you contact the Foster Coordinator about stool issues.

## **Parasites**

Foster pets are routinely treated for internal parasites. There are many parasites and sometimes repeated or extra treatments may be required. Common parasites include but are not limited to: coccidia, tapeworms, roundworms, giardia, and hookworms. Parasites are commonly found in the stool, but it is not uncommon to find them on the anus. Tapeworms look like tiny pieces of rice. Roundworms look like spaghetti noodles and can be seen in stool or in vomit.

Other types of parasites can only be detected during a fecal exam where a sample of your foster pet's stool is examined under a microscope.

Some symptoms of parasites include a large and hard belly, diarrhea, worms present in stool, and inability to gain weight. Parasites can often be transmitted by direct and/or indirect contact and most are contagious to other animals. Some parasites are zoonotic and can be passed from human to animal. Wash your hands thoroughly after touching any items that may have come in contact

with animal feces. Most parasites are treated with a worming medication. The presence of worms is not an emergency. But you should contact the Foster Coordinator to see if a fecal exam should be scheduled.

Some worms will present themselves in the stool up to 36 hours after a worming medication has been given. We will let you know if your foster cat or kitten was recently given a worming medicine and if you should expect to see the passing of worms in the stool.

### **Vomiting**

Animals sometimes get upset stomachs, just like humans. If you have a foster pet that vomits 1-3 times and is otherwise acting normal, eating, and drinking, continue to monitor them. Medication will not be given to an animal who vomits once or twice and is otherwise acting normal and there is no magic way to diagnose why the animal vomited.

If the vomiting happens continuously or if you have kittens that vomit continuously, followed by lethargy, and lack of appetite and it has not happened after a car ride, or other reason explained to you when picking up your foster animal, then you should give the Foster Coordinator a call to discuss the vomiting.

### **Eye Discharge**

Small pieces of crust around the eyes are normal for animals after waking up. If you see continuous yellow or green discharge, accompanied by swollen or closed eyes, your foster pet may have an eye infection and we will want to have them examined by our vet. You can use a warm, damp cloth to help keep infected eyes clean. Clear ocular (eye) discharge should be monitored for any changes and signs that may indicate an infection. Medication will not be prescribed for clear discharge coming from the eyes. If you notice the symptoms of an eye infection, contact the Foster Coordinator as medication may be needed at that point.

### **Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)**

A very common illness in cats and kittens. URI's can be caused by contagious viruses and/or bacteria. **If your foster cat or kitten has clear discharge from their eyes or nose along with sneezing, this is most likely caused by a virus and antibiotics will most likely not be effective or prescribed at this time.**

If your foster pet is acting normal and eating and drinking with clear nasal and/or ocular discharge, supportive care is the best thing to do while their body tries to fight off the virus.

If your foster cat or kitten has yellow or green nasal or ocular discharge, then it is most likely caused by a bacteria and antibiotics will most likely be used to treat the URI.

Signs of a URI include:

- Sneezing and yellow/green discharge from the eyes and nose
- Congested breathing

- Loss of appetite and dehydration
- Lethargy (lack of energy)
- Fever

### **Ear Mites**

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. They can cause itching, scratching, head-shaking and dark brown discharge in the ear that often resemble coffee grounds. Ear mites are contagious to other cats and will need to be treated. If you notice signs of ear mites, contact the Foster Coordinator.

### **Fleas**

Cats and kittens with fleas will frequently scratch themselves. All cats and kittens over 2 pounds are given flea prevention upon intake. Kittens under two pounds cannot receive flea prevention and should instead be bathed in blue Dawn dish soap. This will paralyze the fleas for easy removal. Dawn dish soap will not kill the fleas, so make sure to remove them with a flea comb. Thoroughly dry all young kittens after baths to prevent hypothermia. If you notice fleas on your foster pet, contact the Foster Coordinator.

### **Lice**

Feline lice are species specific and are not contagious to you or other animals. However, they can be spread to other cats. If you notice tiny white specs on the fur, your foster may have lice. Those white specs are called nits and they do not fall off the fur like dandruff. They are difficult to remove. Adult lice are hard to locate on the skin, but can be seen with the naked eye. You may notice your foster scratching at their fur a lot. There is no safe treatment of lice for kittens under 2 pounds. Contact the Foster Coordinator if you notice this.

If your foster cat or kitten(s) have lice, the best thing to do is change out their bedding daily and wash your hands and change your clothing before interacting with your resident cats at home.

### **Ringworm**

Ringworm is a very contagious fungus that is transmittable to other animals and humans. Signs of ringworm are patches of hair loss or thinning hair in irregular or circular shapes. Ringworm spores live in the environment for a very long time. If you suspect your foster cat or kitten has ringworm contact the Foster Coordinator. Signs of ringworm are not an emergency and this can be handled during regular business hours.

### **Limping**

Limping can be caused by a physical injury, but it can also be caused by a fever, vaccine, or a virus. If your foster cat or kitten is limping on their left back leg after being given a vaccine, this is most likely due to the vaccine causing some tenderness. If the limping does not go away after 48 hours, call the Foster Coordinator to discuss the next steps to take.

If your foster cat or kitten is limping and you did not bring them home with an existing injury, place the cat or kitten in a carrier for 30 minutes to rest. If your foster cat or kitten continues to limp after that time, contact the Foster Coordinator.

### **Comprehensive Oral Health Assessment and Treatment (COHAT)**

COHAT's (also known as dentals) are performed as deemed necessary by our veterinarians. If you foster an animal who needs or has undergone a dental procedure you will be given all special care instructions in the email seeking foster care and again when you pick up your foster animal. COHAT's are only performed on adult animals.

Following the COHAT your foster animal may or may not be placed on medication to help with pain and healing. If your foster animal had any extractions, you will need to feed them an all canned food diet. Foster care will continue for an additional 1-2 weeks following a COHAT to allow for recovery. There may be times when recovering from a COHAT a foster animal will not be permitted to play with toys or chew on treats. This will help ensure their mouths heal correctly and as expected. You will be expected to follow all instructions given to you. This will help aid in avoiding complications following a COHAT and ensure a speedy recovery for your foster pet.

### **Unthrifty Kittens**

Sometimes, a kitten that once appeared healthy will suddenly stop thriving. They will stop eating, growing, socializing, and crawling. You may notice they have lost some weight and may seem to cry more. The onset of a kitten who is not thriving happens quickly and even with medical intervention, they often do not survive the next 48 hours after signs appear. Sometimes panleukopenia can be the cause of this.

In the rare event this happens to you, take immediate steps to warm your foster kitten and apply a tiny bit of Karo syrup or sugar water to their gums every 3 minutes. Then, call the Foster Coordinator right away for further instruction. This is a life-threatening emergency that requires immediate attention.



# Routine Veterinary Care & Wellness Checks



All veterinary care for your foster animals is provided by the Jefferson County Humane Society. All veterinary care will be scheduled by appointments only. The Foster Coordinator works directly with the shelter veterinary and clinic staff to manage the health and well-being of each foster animal. The Jefferson County Humane Society has a policy that we will not reimburse individuals for veterinary costs incurred for foster animals when taken for veterinary care outside of that which is pre-authorized by JCHS veterinary staff. Remember you are not authorized to take your foster animal to your personal vet.

## **Wellness Checks**

Foster animals are required to return to the shelter every 2-3 weeks or sooner for vaccinations, deworming, and general exams. All wellness checks require an appointment. The Foster Coordinator will be in contact with you during those times to schedule an appointment

If your foster animal is recovering from an injury or undergoing special medical treatment, wellness checks may occur at more frequent intervals. The Foster Coordinator will inform you of any special wellness needs at the time a post is sent out seeking foster care and again when you arrive to pick up your foster.

Enter through the main entrance of the shelter at the Jefferson County Humane Society and the appointment will be underway.

## **Rescheduling Appointments**

If you cannot attend the scheduled appointment, contact the Foster Coordinator to reschedule. We do ask that you notify us at least two-hours prior to the appointment if you cannot make it.

**Spay and neuter surgeries, heartworm treatments, dental procedures, and dental rechecks cannot be rescheduled.**

### **Vaccines**

All adult cats are vaccinated upon intake with a subcutaneous FVRCP vaccine.

All kittens 4 weeks and older receive subcutaneous FVRCP vaccinations every 3-4 weeks until they are 120 weeks of age or unless otherwise directed by our veterinarians.

FVRCP stands for **F**eline **V**iral **R**hinotracheitis **C**alicivirus and **P**anleukopenia.

All cats and kittens 16 weeks of age and older receive a Rabies vaccine.

## **Adoption Ready**

The day your foster animal is ready for adoption placement is a day to celebrate! Knowing you have played a crucial role in the life-saving work of being a foster caregiver and preparing your foster animals for the journey into a forever home is an incredible accomplishment. And one that should be celebrated! Each time a foster animal is ready to find their permanent home, you should feel empowered knowing you have provided them with the care and love to begin their next chapter in life. Saying goodbye to your foster animals allows you to help more animals in need. There are a few ways foster animals find homes once they are ready to graduate from foster care.

### **Shelter Adoption**

When your foster pet is ready they will come back to the shelter for adoption placement at the Jefferson County Humane Society. We will ask that you provide us with information about your foster pet's behavior and personality quirks. We encourage you to take pictures of your foster pet that we can use on our website and social media pages to promote your foster pet.

### **Offsite Adoption Events**

There may be times when cage space at the shelter is limited and we will not be able to bring your foster pets back to the shelter when they are ready. You may be asked to attend offsite adoption events to help find your foster an adoptive home until cage space opens at the shelter.

### **Yes, you can adopt your foster pet!**

Foster caregivers are always given first choice to adopt their foster pet. Just remember, we rely on and need you to keep fostering! The goal of fostering is to prepare your foster pet for adoption and

allow them to become a life-long companion for a loving family. This means you can continue to help us with our mission and save more lives by continuing to foster. But, if you foster an animal you just cannot part with you are more than welcome to adopt them. It happens to the best of us! Normal adoption fees and protocols will apply.

### **What if a friend or family member wants to adopt my foster animal?**

Remember that some animals are not available for adoption when you begin fostering them and there is an adoption process. But, chances are you will come across friends and family members who fall in love with one of your foster animals. If this happens, it is YOUR responsibility to communicate with them that normal adoption fees and protocols will apply and that we will not be able to “hold” animals for them.

When your foster animal comes back to the shelter and if you have someone **seriously** interested in adopting them, you must give the Foster Coordinator the name and phone number of the person interested in adopting. A phone call will be made when the animal is ready for adoption and the interested person will have to be at the shelter when we open for adoptions.

**Due to the large volume of phone calls our Foster Coordinator receives, phone calls from friends and family wanting updates on the animal they are adopting will not be returned.**

## **Cleaning and Disinfecting Between Foster Pets**

It is extremely important to clean and disinfect between foster pets. This will greatly decrease the chance of a disease or illness from spreading to future foster pets, resident pets, and humans through organisms called fomites. Doorknobs, light switches, litter boxes, food and water bowls, pens, etc. Anything that your foster pet or you touched after handling your foster pet needs to first be cleaned and then disinfected.

Ideally, you should house your foster pet in an area with surfaces that are easy to clean and disinfect. It is important to remember that anything your foster pet or their fur touches or lands on has potential to become a fomite. Books, desk lamps, televisions, etc. Only keep necessary items in your foster pet’s room to lessen the amount of surfaces that will need cleaned and disinfected after the foster pet leaves. Stainless steel items are easy to clean and disinfect. We recommend you use stainless steel food/water bowls and litter boxes. It may be best to use items that are disposable or can be disposed of after your foster pet is done using them.

### **What Are Fomites?**

A fomite is a nonliving object that can carry infectious organisms on its surface. Fomites can essentially be anything that contains traces of a sick foster pet’s fur or body secretions (nasal discharge, saliva, blood, vomit, feces, etc.) on them. Fomites are on all surfaces that a sick foster pet comes in contact with. Even you as a foster caregiver have the potential to carry fomites on your hands and clothing during and after handling foster pets that are or may be sick. This guide

will help you to learn the difference between cleaning and disinfecting to ensure the health of your foster pets.

### **The Difference between Cleaning and Disinfection**

Cleaning is the removal of dirt and debris from an item and/or area, followed by a washing of the item and/or area with soap and water. Cleaning will remove viruses and bacteria but it will not kill them.

Disinfection is the application of an agent that will kill the viruses and bacteria. An example would be properly diluted bleach.

You should always clean first, then disinfect. Surfaces cannot be disinfected before they are cleaned.

Easy surfaces to clean and disinfect include:

- Tile or vinyl floors and countertops
- Tile walls
- Splashboards
- Bathtubs and showers

Difficult surfaces to clean and disinfect:

- Wallpaper
- Carpet
- Wooden furniture
- Hardwood floors
- Books
- Plastic surfaces and items (Ex. Plastic food/water bowls and plastic litter boxes)
- Any cardboard items
- Stuffed toys

### **When and How Often to Clean and Disinfect**

You should always clean and disinfect before new foster pets arrive and after foster pets leave your to come back to the shelter to stay. If you are fostering a sick foster animal, you should clean and disinfect daily. This will remove viruses and bacteria from the environment that could continue to infect your foster pet. If your foster pet is healthy, cleaning and disinfecting should happen weekly. You should provide daily clean-up of messes as needed for your individual foster pet(s).

### **Choosing a Cleaning and Disinfecting Agent**

You will first need to select a detergent or degreaser as your cleaning agent. The dishwashing detergent Dawn® is a recommended choice. A detergent aids in the removal of dirt and grease

from surfaces. A degreaser is a powerful detergent that is formulated to specifically remove oils and greasy debris. Detergent should be mixed with warm to hot water.

Next, you will select a disinfectant. The disinfectant that you choose must be able to kill all kinds of infectious diseases and viruses. Household bleach is the easiest and most recommended disinfectant to use in foster homes. (Remember: bleach can ruin items, this is why it is important to house your foster pet in an area with bleach safe items and surfaces that are easy to clean and disinfect.)

Bleach must be properly diluted to be effective. See the attached ASPCA Diluting Bleach for Disinfection handout attached for proper bleach dilution ratios. We recommend storing diluted bleach in a spray bottle. Bleach is light sensitive. Once diluted, bleach should be stored in an opaque bottle or container and made fresh every 24 hours.

Keep in mind that bleach can burn. Wear disposable gloves and eye protection when mixing bleach. Avoid exposing foster and resident pets to bleach fumes and make sure the room you are cleaning and disinfecting has good ventilation.

### **How to Clean and Disinfect**

#### **Step 1:**

Remove all debris (fur, food, litter, feces, urine, nasal discharge, vomit, etc.). Scrub all surfaces with the chosen detergent or degreaser. Follow with a rinse and dry of those surfaces.

#### **Step 2:**

Disinfect those surfaces by spraying them with diluted bleach and allowing the bleach dilution to remain on those surfaces for at least 10 minutes. The diluted bleach needs a 10 minute contact time to kill viruses and bacteria. You will want to make sure you use enough diluted bleach to keep the surfaces wet for the entire 10 minutes. If the surface dries before the contact time is up, you will need to repeat the process. Once the 10 minute contact time is up, you need to thoroughly rinse the surfaces with water and dry them. If your foster pet became ill with panleukopenia, parvovirus, feline calicivirus, or ringworm, you will need to repeat the disinfection process at least another two times.

### **How to Clean and Disinfect Surfaces Not Bleach Safe**

Bedding, carpet, and upholstered furniture are a few items that would become damaged by using diluted bleach on them.

For bedding, clothes worn while handling your foster pet, stuffed animals, and fabric toys place them in a washing machine and launder with hot water. Wash these items separate from your regular household laundry. Laundry detergent should be measured out using the label on the bottle.

You will want to choose a cycle that washes the items with detergent and then rinses them. Follow that cycle with one that introduces bleach to disinfect and provides a rinse. Some washing machines allow you to adjust the setting to run this way, if not, you will need to run your washing machine twice.

Dry the items in the dryer or direct sunlight once done washing. Sunlight will act as an additional disinfectant but should never be relied on as the sole means of disinfecting.

For carpeted surfaces you will want to thoroughly vacuum the carpeted area making sure to get under all tables, chairs, furniture, etc. Then, you will need to clean the carpet with a carpet cleaner. You can rent carpet cleaners if you do not own one. You can also steam clean the carpet as an appropriate means of disinfecting. Use the same method for furniture by vacuuming the surface and underneath, then follow with a steam cleaner. Remember that the vacuum, carpet cleaner and/or steam cleaner can become fomites themselves and they will need cleaned and disinfected after use.

Wooden furniture and floors, as well as wallpaper are extremely hard to disinfect. The best option for these types of surfaces is to polish wood furniture and flooring several times with a furniture polish to thoroughly clean it. However, wood flooring and furniture cannot be disinfected because it is not bleach safe. For wallpaper, carefully wipe it down with a disinfecting wipe or a cleaner safe to use on wallpaper. Remember, wallpaper is also not able to be disinfected, only cleaned because it is not a bleach safe surface.

The disinfectant that we use at JCHS is called Rescue®. They do sell a product that can be used in a carpet cleaner. In addition, you can also purchase the disinfectant to use in your home. The use of bleach is recommended for its low cost and easy dilution. If you would like more information on the Rescue disinfectant visit their website: <https://rescuedisinfectants.com/>

### **Additional Considerations**

There are a few infectious diseases that are incredibly difficult to get rid of in the environment. Panleukopenia, ringworm, and parvovirus are a few examples. If your foster pet has come down with one of those viruses, you should dispose of any items that cannot be disinfected. Follow the phrase, “when in doubt, throw it out”.

#### **Ringworm**

Ringworm spores are airborne and will travel everywhere. Use extra caution when cleaning after a ringworm foster to avoid spreading spores where you do not want them. Refrain from shaking out bedding and be careful when dumping litter into a trash bag. Swiffer dusters are a great tool to use in catching ringworm spores and fur on surfaces. Dispose of the Swiffer duster after use as it cannot be disinfected. If you foster a pet with ringworm or one who has come down with ringworm, you should change the furnace filters in your home.

### Panleukopenia and Parvovirus

These two viruses are extremely persistent and can last in the environment for years. If your foster pet has come down with one of these viruses it is recommended that you do not bring another foster or resident pet of the same species under the age of 5 months old into your home for at least one year. The only pets that should enter your home are those who are over the age of 5 months old and fully vaccinated against the virus that affects their species. These two viruses are extremely serious and fatal. You can never be too safe when these hard to eliminate viruses are present in the environment.

### **Helpful Tips when Cleaning and Disinfecting**

- Be sure to practice frequent hand washing after handling sick foster pets and cleaning up after them. Wearing disposable gloves is never a bad idea when cleaning up and handling sick foster pets.
- Clean items should not be placed on dirty surfaces and vice versa
- Keep small containers of supplies in your foster area/room to avoid contaminating entire bags of food, etc.
- Never hesitate to contact the Foster Coordinator if you have questions on the cleaning and disinfection process.

Cleaning and disinfecting are very important in preventing illness and disease from spreading. Even if you do not have any resident pets, it is extremely important to house foster pets in a separate area of your home. If after 7-10 days, your foster pet appears healthy and is not being treated for any illness, if you choose you may contact the Foster Coordinator to ask for permission to allow your foster pet to explore more areas of the home. If your foster pet is sick or becomes ill it is very important they remain in their foster area and separate from your resident pets to avoid contamination to your home and resident pets. Cleaning and disinfection may not be the most fun part of being a foster caregiver, but it is a very important aspect of foster care.

## Additional Foster Program Information

### **Maddie's Pet Assistant**

Maddie's Pet Assistant is an app that you can download on your phone that offers support and advice to foster caregivers. When you take home a foster pet you will automatically receive login information for MPA, whether or not you have the app.



MPA will prompt you to fill out short surveys on how your foster pet is doing in your home. Based on your answers you will receive personalized advice and support to help you along your foster journey.

MPA is not mandatory, but it is highly recommended to have if you are able to download apps on your phone.

## **Join our Jefferson County Humane Society Foster Facebook Group**

Please join our Facebook group where we first post cats/kittens available for fostering. You can also post pictures and share stories of your foster pets. We encourage you to seek general advice and tips from other foster parents and you can find and share educational articles related to foster care. Please adhere to the rules of our Facebook page. We reserve the right to remove any posts, comments, etc. that are not appropriate. Please remember: medical questions, concerns, and advice regarding your foster pets should not be posted on this page.

## **Continuing Education**

As you check your email regularly for important foster program information and updates from the Foster Coordinator, keep your eyes open for opportunities to enhance your foster care education with special in-house training and seminars hosted by our foster team.

## **Euthanasia Policy**

The Jefferson County Humane Society does not euthanize animals for space or place time limits on animals in our care. We will not place aggressive, terminally ill, very sick, or suffering animals in foster care.

In the incredibly rare event you take home a foster animal whose mental and/or physical wellbeing brings about a terminally ill or aggressive diagnosis we will have an open discussion with you regarding euthanasia, quality of life, and safety to the public.

If you ever have a foster animal who suddenly passes away, you should immediately alert the Foster Coordinator. This is an extremely rare occurrence with neonatal/young kittens being the most susceptible to sudden death.

Please know if something tragic happens, that we will always be here to support and listen to you in any way that we can.

# Cat & Kitten Health Cheat Sheet

Use this cheat sheet to help you decipher between emergencies and non-emergencies. You will be expected to adhere to this cheat sheet and will be asked to reference it. The non-emergencies listed below are still health concerns we want to know, but they do not warrant an after-hours emergency phone call. Utilize the health section in this care guide to assist you when you become worried.

Please try to remain calm in the event of an emergency or if you become concerned over the welfare of your foster pet. Remember that the Jefferson County Humane Society will **not** reimburse you for medical care sought outside of the shelter that is not pre-authorized. Your phone calls will be returned in a timely manner when you leave a voicemail.

If you have questions about the health of your foster animal or if an emergency should arise during the hours of 8:30am-5pm Monday through Friday or 10am-4pm Saturday-Sunday, please call the shelter at (740) 314-5583. If an emergency should arise outside of regular shelter hours please send an email to [jchsfoster@jc-hs.org](mailto:jchsfoster@jc-hs.org).

### Non-Emergencies

- Runny discharge from the eyes or nose (clear or yellow/green)
- Lack of appetite
- Lethargy (lack of energy) for less than 24 hours
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Weight loss
- Coughing and sneezing
- Lack of bowel movements
- Lack of urination
- Swollen eyes or eyes held closed
- Blood in urine

### Emergencies

- Continuous vomiting and/or bloody diarrhea accompanied by lack of appetite, and lethargy
- Any trauma (hit by car, dropped, unconscious, limping caused by trauma, severe bleeding, etc.)
- Difficulty breathing
- A newborn kitten that does not respond and/or has not eaten for more than a day
- Straining to urinate
- Very pale, blue, or grey gums
- Seizures
- Very high or low body temperature (Below 100°F or higher than 102.5°F)
- Difficulty giving birth (if applicable)
- A foster animal that has escaped your home

## Foster Program Contact Info

### Primary Contact:

**Kathrien Eddy**  
*Foster Care Coordinator*  
(740) 314-5583  
Schedule: Tuesday – Saturday

**SUNDAY AND MONDAY DURING REGULAR SHELTER HOURS**

Call: (740) 314-5583

**AFTER HOURS EMERGENCIES**

E-mail: [JCHSFOSTER@JC-HS.ORG](mailto:JCHSFOSTER@JC-HS.ORG)

# Fecal Score Chart

Please use this chart if you call the Foster Coordinator concerned about your foster pet's stool. This will be used to help figure out what is going on with your foster pet and how we will be able to best treat the problem or concern.



**PURINA**

## FECAL SCORE CHART

Fecal consistency is primarily a function of the amount of moisture in the stool and can be used to identify changes in colonic health and other problems. Ideally, in a healthy animal, stools should be firm but not hard, pliable and segmented, and easy to pick up (Score 2).



### Score 1

Very hard and dry; requires much effort to expel from the body; no residue left on ground when picked up. Often expelled as individual pellets.



### Score 2

Firm, but not hard; should be pliable; segmented in appearance; little or no residue left on ground when picked up.



### Score 3

Log-like; little or no segmentation visible; moist surface; leaves residue, but holds firm when picked up.



### Score 4

Very moist (soggy); distinct log shape visible; leaves residue and loses form when picked up.



### Score 5

Very moist but has distinct shape (piles rather than distinct logs); leaves residue and loses form when picked up.



### Score 6

Has texture, but no defined shape; occurs as piles or as spots; leaves residue when picked up.



### Score 7

Watery, no texture, flat; occurs as puddles. Leaves residue.