



# Kitten Manual



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# THE BASICS

## Welcome to TCR's Foster Care Kitten Program!

This in depth manual will cover how to care of TCR kittens, pregnant queens and a mother with her babies.

Up to date information can be found at [www.meowapedia.com](http://www.meowapedia.com)



The Foster Care Program allows Toronto Cat Rescue (TCR) to take in kittens and/or queens that are at risk in our city shelters due to limitations of space and resources. Kitten season begins in early March, and runs until December. We usually have more newborn kittens than specialized foster homes.

Typically, kittens in the Foster Care Program are those who need extra care. They may not have yet reached 8 weeks old (the usual spay/neuter age) and require more individual care than the shelter can provide. At this young age, they are also fragile and susceptible to getting very sick from viruses in the shelter. It takes a lot of work and a lot of patience to care for kittens. If the kittens are older than 8 weeks and are not yet spayed or neutered, it's likely because they need medical or socialization intervention that the shelter cannot provide.

# Are you ready for the commitment?

Fostering requires a flexible schedule and a personal commitment to the kittens. On a typical day, you can expect to give food and water to the kittens at least twice. The litter box(es) will also need scooping at least twice a day. Do not forget to allow for a little playtime and snuggling! If the kittens you are fostering are sick, you will have to medicate the kittens as well. Expect to spend at least two or three hours a day caring for your kittens.

Although fostering is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. You get to help kittens grow from helpless little beings into confident, well-adjusted family pets. You also get the fun of raising a kitten without the responsibility of lifetime care (and vet bills!). Most importantly, you are saving lives!

## Foster families are asked to supply:

- Healthy & safe environment
- Litter
- Toys
- Transportation to & from vet clinics and retail adoption centres if possible
- Socialization
- Kitten food
- Interaction with toys & different noises around your house

TCR has a modest food program and we endeavour to subsidize the cost of kitten food to fosters who take multiple kittens (more than 2).

We often have donated supplies (including litter and food) available for foster parents to pick up for free at our [Volunteer Centre, located at 4229C Dundas Street West](#), Toronto M8X 1Y3. [VC@torontocatrescue.ca](mailto:VC@torontocatrescue.ca)

These items are not guaranteed, and it is important to remember to keep your foster cat and kittens on the same diet.



# Supplies

Foster families are asked to supply these items, and have them ready before your fosters arrive.

## Required Items

Item	Purpose
Food	Kitten specific food of high quality
Dishes	Get extras to be able to wash the bowls often
Toys	Providing enrichment and socialization exercises
Litter Box & Scoop	Box with low sides so kitten are able to enter
Towel & Blankets	Creating a bed and/or a nest for nursing
Carrier	Transporting cats/kittens to/from vet appointments and retail adoption locations
Litter	Any type of biodegradable “green” litter is acceptable. Do not use clay litter with kittens especially clumping. It can be fatal if ingested.
Kitchen Digital Scale	Weighing kittens to ensure they are growing and weigh them prior to surgery



# Supplies

## Suggested Items

Item	Purpose
Scratching Post	Providing enrichment, exercise and protection of furniture
“Churu” meat tube treats	Feeding finicky or ill kittens
Kitten Milk Replacer	Nourishing orphaned kittens
Hot Water Bottle, Heating Pad or Heating Disc	Warming ill or orphan kittens
Large Dog Crate	Creating a nest for a nursing mom or to be used as a way to contain kittens in one area, especially for socialization cases
Brush & Nail Clippers	Grooming
Enzymatic Stain Remover	Removing accident stains and odours
Baby Gate	Securing kittens in one area
Nebulizer or Humidifier	For kittens with upper respiratory symptoms
Camera	For watching kittens while at work or away from home
Paper or velcro collars	To tell kittens that look alike apart

# Providing a Safe Environment

Instinct tells mom cats to keep their kittens safe and, to feel safe, they need privacy, quiet, and minimal activity. Stress can cause cats to become aggressive, not to take care of their babies properly, and, in some instances, even causes extreme behaviours such as cannibalism. Your role is to give the mom cat an environment where she can feel comfortable raising her young.

Before your foster(s) arrive, choose a space that is free of things that can hurt a kitten. You must be able to control the temperature of the room—be sure there are no drafts. The kittens should be isolated from any other pets, as some kitten illnesses are transmittable and occasionally fatal, even to grown cats.

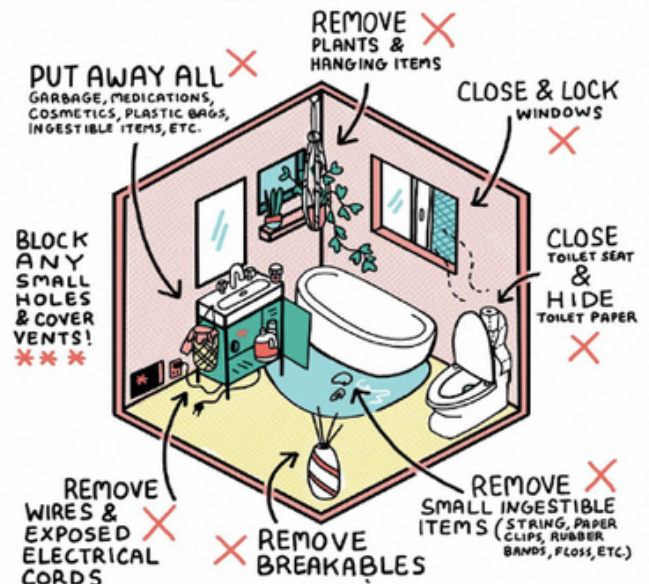
The room your foster kittens are living in should be able to withstand litter box accidents, vomit, food messes, and spilled medicine. A bathroom is often a good choice for fostering (just don't forget to close the toilet lid and hide the toilet paper!).

## CAT SANCTUARY ROOM: DONE RIGHT



WWW.JVFRYER.COM

## CAT SANCTUARY ROOM: DONE WRONG



WWW.JVFRYER.COM

[More detailed information on a safe sanctuary space can be found here](#)

# Kitten-Proofing the Room

Remember that kittens will try to get into everything!

- Make sure the garbage, cleaning supplies, and medicines are secure.
- Review the toxic houseplant list at the [ASPCA](#) and remove all poisonous plants from your household. Do not keep any type of plants in your kitten room.
- Keep all small items like rubber bands, string, ribbon, paper clips, needles, and fishhooks – anything kitty can swallow – out of reach.
- Any windows in the room should be kept closed or securely screened. (Note: screens may be ineffective against a determined mama cat!!)
- Keep plastic bags, which can cause suffocation, out of reach.
- Tightly seal or screw down vent covers.
- Block off stairs with a baby gate
- Exposed electrical cords are a very real danger. Kitties might chew them and end up getting an electrical shock – this can cause mouth burns or even death. Encase cords in the plastic flexible tubing on the market for just this purpose. Tubing can be purchased at office supply stores. A product called “Bitter Apple,” available at pet stores, can be sprayed at regular intervals on the cords to discourage chewing as well.
- Block any small holes (anything bigger than ½”) where a kitten might hide and become inaccessible to you. It helps to lie down on your stomach so that you can see the room from the kittens’ point of view and identify potential hazards. (i.e., under cupboards or where pipes meet the wall in kitchens/bathrooms)





# Cleaning & Sanitizing

It is extremely important to thoroughly clean the environment after every group of foster kittens. This helps to prevent the transmission of viruses and infections to your new group of fosters.

- Use items that are machine washable
- Soft covered items such as cat trees, or sofas should be scrubbed with an all-purpose cleaner, vacuumed, and then sanitized using a handheld steam cleaner.
- Hard surfaces, including litters, scoops, walls and cabinets can be wiped using an all-purpose cleaner and then sanitized with 1:10 bleach.
- Food bowls and dishes should be washed daily and sanitized

Some items may need to be thrown out if they cannot be properly cleaned.

If your groups has a case of ringworm, calicivirus, severe URI or rare intestinal parasite you will need to use a stronger disinfectant such as pre-vail or 1:40 bleach. Pre-vail is available for loan from our [Volunteer Centre](#).

Best practice is to take a break in fostering to allow full decontamination of the environment before bringing in another kitten.



# KITTEN FOSTERING

## Orphaned Kittens

Kittens generally come into the foster program because they are either too young for adoption or are sick and need time to recover. Kittens without a mother need a little extra care and love. Depending on their age, they may need bottle feeding every 2-3 hours, or they may be old enough to already be weaned.

## Bottle Feeding

Without a mother cat, kittens need to be bottle fed every few hours. Sometimes when the mother cat is caring for her young, supplemental feeding may be needed.

Use only approved kitten formula, as provided or advised by TCR. Most kitten milk replacer's (KMR) can only be reheated once after being refrigerated. Be sure to make small batches at a time to avoid causing GI upset or wasting the formula. Pre-mixed KMR is only good for 3 days once open, while the powder KMR can last for 3 months in the fridge, and 6 months in the freezer.

The following are some general guidelines to help you get started. They are benchmarks only. Follow your kitten's lead, track consumption and weight and stay in touch with your foster coordinator.

Age Range	Amount	Frequency	Weight Range
0 - 1 week	02 - 06ml	Every 2 hours	70gms - 150gms
1 - 2 weeks	06 - 10ml	Every 2 - 3 hours	150gms - 250gms
2 - 3 weeks	10 - 14ml	Every 3 - 4 hours	250gms - 350gms
3 - 4 weeks	14 - 18ml	Every 4 - 5 hours	350gms - 450gms
4 - 5 week	18 - 22ml	Every 5 - 6 hours	450gms - 550gms

**\*Ensure water is always available once kittens are 3-4 weeks old**

# How to Bottle Feed

- Ensure the kitten is warm
- NEVER lay the kitten on its back, as this may cause the kitten to inhale fluid into its lungs. Always bottle feed in a belly-down posture (like a kitten would nurse from its mother)
- Use a Miracle Nipple with very young kittens
- For other types of nipples, you may need to cut the hole, which should be neither too small nor too large. To ensure proper flow, turn the bottle upside down. If the formula drips slowly one drop at a time, it is the correct size. If too small, enlarge the hole. If too large, use another nipple.
- The formula should be body temperature and can be warmed by immersing the bottle in hot water. Be sure to test the temperature on your wrist before trying to feed
- Never squeeze the formula into the kitten's mouth, as this may cause aspiration, pneumonia and/or death
- Sterilize nipples every 24-48hrs by submerging in boiling water for 5 minutes



## Target weights

0-1 weeks	70g - 150g
1-2 weeks	150g- 250g
2-3 weeks	250g - 350g
3-4 weeks	350g - 450g

Kittens may surpass the target weights. This is great! However if a kitten is falling behind on weight gain you must let your FC know.

## Helpful Online Resources For Bottle Feeding

Little Orphan Kittens	<a href="https://youtu.be/W3IzCkjGQ_E?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/W3IzCkjGQ_E?feature=shared</a> (1 Minute)
Kitten Lady	<a href="https://youtu.be/ebDPivG16HE?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/ebDPivG16HE?feature=shared</a> (11 Minutes)

# Weaning

## Transitioning to Canned and Kibble Food

At approximately 4-5 weeks, weaning can begin. It is important to remove any uneaten food after 2 hours and dispose to prevent GI upset. Each kitten should have their own bowls to prevent fighting. Keep an extra close on kittens while they wean as they not get the hang of eating slurry and may still need to bottle feed.

### Bottle-fed Kittens

- Provide mixed formula on a plate or a very small bowl (expect kittens to step and/or lay in it!), and over time, increase the amount of canned kitten food in the mixture and continue to water down the formula
- Gradually reduce bottle feeding as kittens consume more “slurry” (mixture of formula, water and wet food)
- **Do NOT reintroduce formula once the kitten has been fully weaned onto canned food**

### Nursing Kittens

- Mix canned food with warm water to create slurry. It should start as very runny (like soup) and can become thicker as the kittens adapt.

### 7 – 9 weeks

- By 7 weeks, kittens should be eating wet food (may or may not be in slurry form) and kibble (some prefer kibble to start)
- By 8-9 weeks, kittens should be consuming about 4-5oz (120-150g) of canned food total in 2-4 servings per day, however you may give a kitten as much food as they want
- Kibble should always be available
- Water should always be available





## TIPS:

- Keep a [logbook](#) to track the kitten's weight daily
- Use colour paper or velcro collars to tell kittens apart
- Track formula and food consumption at each feeding
- Lack of appetite can become an emergency quickly, so email your FC immediately and after 24 hours [fosteremergency@torontocatrescue.ca](mailto:fosteremergency@torontocatrescue.ca)
- Powdered kitten formula can be mixed with very hot tap water and shaken (instead of stirred) to eliminate lumps (it will cool very quickly). You can also use a strainer to remove any lumps if needed.
- Formula dries like glue on kitten fur, so wipe immediately with a warm wet cloth or paper towel
- Slurry (canned food mixed with water or formula) also blends better when shaken
- Wash dishes after every serving
- Water bowls should be washed and replenished daily

If your foster kitten refuses to eat, contact your Foster Coordinator immediately. Your Foster Coordinator will help you assess the situation and advise you of the next steps.



# Play

Play is a very important part of kitten development. Kittens are very curious! They need toys and interaction with other kittens and people to engage their brains, learn about their environment, develop their physical coordination, and provide exercise. Without these sources of stimulation, they will find their own entertainment – which will likely not be safe or desirable. When the kittens are old enough, you will need to play with them several times a day. Avoid using hands or fingers when initiating play to prevent the kitten biting.

## Other Kittens

It is crucial for kittens to be with other kittens to learn important socialization skills with cats and with humans. The physical play and wrestling help them understand what is too rough and learn to limit their nipping and scratching. At all times, we will assign foster placement of kittens in pairs at a minimum or in a home with other young cats they can be slowly introduced to.

## Solo Toys

Kittens should always have “solo” toys available to them. These are toys they can play with alone and should be easy to sanitize and impossible for the kittens to consume. Ping-pong balls, toilet paper tubes, wine corks, and boxes are some examples.

## Interactive Toys

Interactive toys should never be left with an unsupervised kitten. These toys are great for encouraging kittens to exercise and engage their natural hunting skills but may have parts the kittens could ingest or become tangled in. Also, kittens like to chew on everything and, when pieces of plastic, rubber, string, etc are ingested, they may get caught in the kittens' intestines.

Interactive toys can be helpful in engaging shy kittens and start building trust.

## Other Entertainment and Physical Play

Kittens love to climb furniture, curtains, windows, door screens, and humans, so, it's best to give them something more appropriate. If you can provide progressively taller climbers as the kittens mature, that would be ideal. A scratching post can also double as a midsize climber.

Scratching pads and/or posts are important for helping kittens develop good habits. Many have attached toys to attract kittens.

## Grooming

It is a good idea to establish a grooming routine with your foster cat. Acclimatize them to brushing and nail trimming so their future family and veterinarian have an easier time handling them. Open their mouth for inspection and manipulate their ears and paws to make it easier for a veterinarian to examine them. Do this while the kitten is relaxed and sleepy (but not sleeping).

We do NOT recommend that you bathe any kitten in your care since cats do a very fine job of keeping their own coats clean. In rare instances, you may use a damp towel, or pet wipe to wet the fur of your kitten. There are also dry shampoo products available on the market if your foster kitten's coat requires cleaning.

### Brushing

We encourage you to brush your foster cat not only to establish a regular grooming routine but to minimize any aversion the cat may have to handling. Cats are most effectively brushed with a soft bristle brush, but a comb may be necessary for longer haired cats.

## Nail Trimming

Please follow the guidelines below and trim the nails on a weekly basis using nail clippers specifically designed for cats. Before trimming your foster cat's nails, it is a good idea to get her used to having her paws handled and squeezed. Begin by gently petting her legs while giving her a treat. Gradually increase the pressure so that petting becomes squeezing, which you will need to do later when you extend the claw to clip the nail.

Apply a small amount of pressure to the cat's paw, with your thumb on top of the paw and your index finger under the pad, until the claws are extended. You should be able to see the quick (pink blood vessel inside the nail). Trim the tip of the nail.

Do not cut into the quick of the nail, as it will be painful and likely bleed. If you accidentally cut the quick, apply pressure over the bleeding nail with a cotton ball for a couple of minutes until the bleeding stops and apply styptic powder, flour or cornstarch to the tip of the nail.

[A video on how to trim nails can be found here](#)

## Litter Box

The litter box you provide for your kittens should have low sides so that it is easy for the kittens to get in and out. Plastic boxes are usually the most cost effective and easy to use because they can be sanitized often. Some foster parents prefer disposable litter boxes such as cardboard food boxes. Be sure to use biodegradable litter such as newspaper, tofu, wood pellets, corn etc.

**Do NOT use clay or clumping litter.**

Litter boxes should be kept clean at all times. Scooping the box twice a day is a good guideline, unless you have lots of kittens or the kittens are sick, in which case, you may need to clean it more often. If you're using a plastic litter box, make sure to dump all litter out regularly, and wash with hot soapy water. A clean box will encourage good litter box habits and will limit the kittens' exposure to germs.



Many kittens experience litter box problems. This can be from a medical concern (usually diarrhea) or due to the fact that the kitten is still being house trained.

Another possibility is that the kitten has too much territory, and cannot get back to the litter box in time to eliminate.

One or two litter box misses are acceptable, but if a kitten is having repeated problems with litter box usage, please contact your Foster Coordinator.

### TIPS:

- Use small canned food boxes to train small kittens
- Keep the kittens confined to a small territory. The younger the kittens, the smaller the space should be.
- Return the kitten to its litter box regularly. Do not force the kitten to stay in the litter box; just gently place her near or in the box every 15-20 minutes as a reminder.
- Clean all “accidents” well with enzyme cleaners (such as Nature's Miracle).
- Never yell at or otherwise punish a kitten for urinating or defecating outside the box.



# Positive Reinforcement

The best way to handle most undesirable feline behaviours is to prevent them.

Kittens are at the most playful and curious stages of their lives. They are likely to explore and test the environment in ways that an adult cat may not. Many kittens will grow out of this tendency as they get older, so it's best to allow them to enact their natural kitten curiosity while trying to establish good habits. In most cases, it's better to distract a kitten from an inappropriate behaviour and direct them to something more positive. Distracting a kitten beforehand is even better because it lowers the risk that a kitten may view the distraction as a reward. You can do this by getting their attention with noise, toys or treats.



Another way to address inappropriate behaviour is to modify the environment. This may involve such things as putting things out of reach, or using double-sided tape on off-limit surfaces.

Any type of physical punishment, such as nose tapping or scruffing, is recognized by leading cat behaviour experts as detrimental and counterproductive and can lead to aggression. Additionally, water bottles or sprays should not be used to correct kitten misbehaviours.

# Sexing Kittens

It is possible to sex a kitten as early as birth, but it will be cleared around the end of the first week. Sexing is important for tracking purposes, as well as for helping to determine if they are to be scheduled for a spay or neuter. If you are unsure, please contact your FC for help and provide pictures.

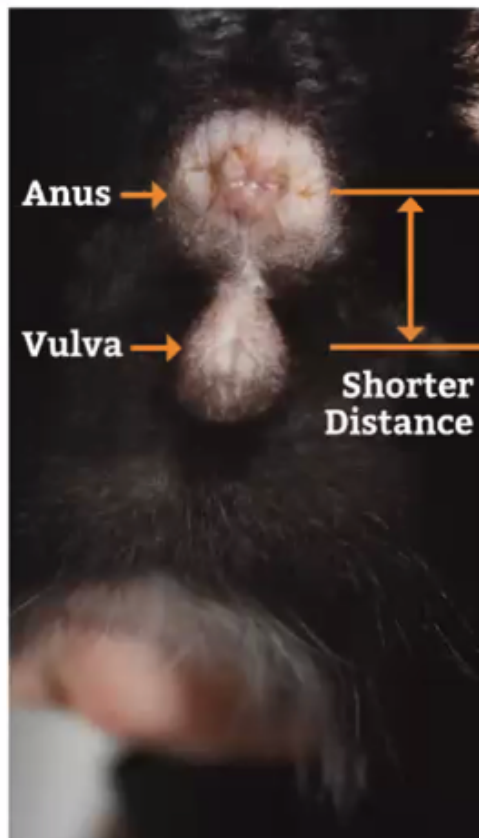


## Is It a Male or Female Kitten?

It can be difficult to distinguish between male and female kittens, especially when they are just a few days old. The most reliable way is to look at the shape of the genital opening and the distance to the anus. When you have a litter of kittens, it can be particularly helpful to compare littermates.

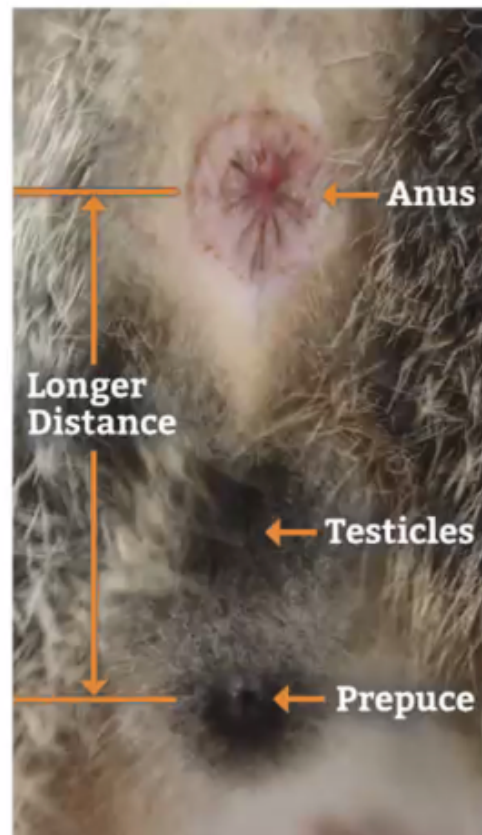
### Females:

The genital opening appears as a vertical slit and is located directly below the anus.



### Males:

The penis appears as a small round dot and is a greater distance from the anus, with the testicles located in between.



*This distance guide can also be used for adult cats.*

ASPCApro.org



# When can kittens be put up for adoption?

TCR places kittens for adoption when the following conditions are met:

- The kittens are a minimum of [8 weeks old](#) and 1kg/2lbs in weight
- The kittens have been vaccinated with at least one round of FVRCP and spayed/neutered (performed at 1kg/2lbs)
- The kittens have been quarantined for a minimum of 2 weeks to ensure they
- The kittens are social
- The kittens healthy and are not showing any sign of illness

It is important to get your kittens prepared for adoption as quickly as possible for several reasons. Many adopters want kittens as young as safely possible. Even a week or two older reduces their quick adoptability. More importantly, during kitten season, the waiting list for kittens needing rescue is often over 100 long. Kittens die and are euthanized in shelters when they get sick or are not eating well on their own. We cannot save their lives if we do not have foster space.

Your Foster Coordinator or the Vetting team will contact you when it is time to take your kittens to the vet for their surgery. Please be prepared to submit their pictures and bios as soon as they return from the vet. In many cases, your Foster Coordinator will make arrangements to have your kittens transferred to a retail adoption center to support our partner programs and fundraising efforts.



# PREGNANT QUEENS

Domestic cats are very fertile. Litter size averages four or five kittens. Gestation or the length of pregnancy of a cat averages 64 days but is generally between 62 and 67 days or about 9-10 weeks. Problems during pregnancy and birth are extremely rare in all breeds except Persian cats. Over 99% of all cats deliver their kittens without assistance or complications. But when it is your foster cat, it is comforting to know that things are proceeding without issues and on schedule.

## What should my role be in the birthing process?

Don't become involved in the birthing unless you are certain that you are needed. Keep her area quiet, calm and dimly lit. Once the last kitten has been delivered you can quietly clean up the mess she has left behind. It is helpful to stack several layers of towels in her nest before delivery so that the top layer can easily be removed without making too much of a disturbance.

Place a fresh bowl of water, some cat food and a litter beside her because mother cats don't like to leave their kittens for the first day or two. Avoid handling the kittens for the first few days, except to move for nursing, daily weight checks, or health concerns.

### Pre-Labour

**Twenty-four to forty-eight hours before labour begins, your foster cat will seem more anxious and restless.**

She will often poke her head about looking for a place to nest and have the litter. This behaviour can sometimes occur early as three days before she actually delivers. At this point, make sure she is confined to the room you want her to give birth in. Be sure to provide mom with multiple nesting areas in the room. Covered cardboard boxes, soft blankets, beds in corners are all great options.

During this time her appetite will increase to almost double her usual eating habits. It is best to provide mom with as much food as she would like to eat.

## What should I expect during labour & delivery?

As her body prepares for labour with the release of hormones, she might become very friendly and will want to cuddle up and purr. Some moms might constantly purr and knead, but still want their space and may hiss or swat at you. Allow the cat to dictate how you react with or without attention and be sure to give her space if that is what she wants.

There are some great videos to watch online to acquaint yourself with the process.

Kitty Cat Soul Food	<a href="https://youtu.be/piFSU0H_2v4?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/piFSU0H_2v4?feature=shared</a> (6 mins)
Lucky Paws	<a href="https://youtu.be/aqBi4W2aY-E?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/aqBi4W2aY-E?feature=shared</a> (20 mins)
Tiny Kittens	<a href="https://youtu.be/n6e3CaaF8ZE?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/n6e3CaaF8ZE?feature=shared</a> (3 hours)

### Labour – Stage I

Before birthing she will lose all interest in food and become serious and attentive to only her licking. You may notice an increase in her breathing rate. It is quite common for the mother to sit with her mouth open and yowl loudly or pace the room. This stage of labor typically lasts 6 to 12 hours.

### Labour – Stage II

Stage 2 of labour is when the kittens inside an amniotic sac should arrive. As her labour progresses and uterine contractions begin, pregnant cats will lay on their sides and intermittently squat and press downward to expel the kittens. Once you notice a reddish discharge has been emitted, it won't be long until the first kittens and their placentas begin to appear—normally in less than an hour but can be up to several hours. Do not interrupt or disturb the mother during this period – just watch from a door left ajar or from a camera. Other kittens should arrive with an interval of 30 minutes to 4 hours between them. On occasion kittens can be born in rapid succession.

## Labour – Stage III

Each kitten arrives wrapped in a jelly-like membrane filled with clear fluid – the amniotic sac. Mum will begin to lick the kitten in the amniotic sac until it ruptures. Mum will expel each placenta after each kitten and eat them. You need to keep track of how many placentas there are. A different number of placentas to kittens means something is wrong. If multiple kittens are born quickly, several placentas may be expelled together.

Stage 2 and 3 labour will go back and forth until all kittens are born. You will know all kittens are born when contractions stop, mum has cleaned up all the kittens, eaten the placentas, returns to normal eating and drinking, and using the litter.



### Suggested items to keep on hand:

- Keep plenty of clean towels on hand when your cat is expecting. They will become stained so use old or inexpensive ones.
- Iodine solution (Betadine) for antiseptic, dental floss and a pair of blunt scissors in case you need to cut the umbilical cord
- Digital kitten scale to monitor daily kitten weight gain
- Camera or baby monitor so not to disturb her

# How long should I wait?

**The first kitten should arrive within an hour after the onset of labour.**

Sometimes labour lasts only a few minutes before the kitten arrives. Other kittens should arrive with an interval of ten minutes to an hour between them.

Each kitten arrives wrapped in a jelly-like membrane filled with clear fluid – the amniotic sac- and attached to the placenta. Good mothers immediately begin licking the kitten forcefully, which shreds this sac allowing the kitten to breathe. This licking stimulates the kitten's circulation and respiration. Mom will also bite the umbilical cord to disconnect the placenta and will eat most of, if not all, the amniotic sac and placenta.



**Although delivery of each kitten can take up to 2 hours, the average time is 30 to 60 minutes.**

A kitten should not spend more than 15 minutes in the birth canal. While in the birth canal, pressure on the umbilical cord deprives the kitten of oxygen. If you should see a kitten in this predicament, grasp it gently through a soft cloth (they are slippery!) and pull it with a motion that is backwards and downwards. Grasp the kitten by its hips or shoulders and not by its legs or head. It is normal for kittens to arrive either headfirst or tail first.



In the exceptionally rare case where the mother does not free the kitten's mouth from the obstructing membrane, you should do it for her and follow this with a vigorous rubbing of the kitten in a soft towel to dry it and stimulate it to breath. Kittens are delicate - so don't over-do the rubbing.

If mom forgets to chew off the umbilical cord to one or more of the kittens once labour is finished, you can tie off the cord with a length of dental floss or string and snip the cord about an inch long. It is important to let the mother do these things herself if she is willing because through licking and mothering the kitten she bonds with it and recognizes it as her infant. It also helps her to let down her milk.

The mother cat will probably begin nursing the kitten before the next littermates arrive. If she doesn't, place the kitten on one of her nipples. The nursing will stimulate her uterus to contract further so you may see a bloody or greenish discharge at her vagina. She may eat a few (or all) of the afterbirths. Although gross to watch, they are full of essential nutrients for mom to gain strength for nursing and is a normal behaviour.

**It usually takes 2 to 6 hours for the entire litter to be delivered. In rare circumstances, it can take up to 24 hours for the entire litter to be born**

If active labour (licking and pushing) persists beyond a few hours with no kittens contact your Foster Coordinator or the Emergency Foster email.

While she is delivering, keep her area quiet, calm and dimly lit. Do not become involved in the birthing unless you are certain that you are needed.





After birth, the mother may discharge a bloody fluid for up to 10 days. Cats usually lick the discharge up as fast as it is produced. Only become concerned if the discharge becomes pus-like, has a strong odour, or if it is a large amount and soaking through the towels.

## Problems to watch for:

- The mother continues to have contractions for more than four hours and no kitten appears
- The mother is actively pushing/straining for 45-60 minutes and no kitten comes out
- The vaginal discharge has a strong odour or appears infected
- The mother continues to bleed quite a bit after birth. Small amounts are okay.
- You counted fewer placentas than you have kittens (if you are present for the birth and able to count)
- Kittens will not nurse or appear weak
- The mother goes off food or becomes depressed, weak or lethargic
- A mammary gland (breast) is hot, hard or painful
- Kittens mew continuously, do not sleep and are agitated
- Kittens are not receiving enough milk to keep their stomachs plump and distended or are gaining less than 10g per day
- The kittens are losing weight

There is a fairly high mortality rate in kittens, especially within the first four weeks. In most cases we do not know the mother's history and it is unlikely that she has received adequate pre-natal care and nutrition. If you feel your kittens are fading or they begin passing away, please contact your Foster Coordinator.

There is very little that can be done, but they will provide you with supportive home care suggestions. There is nothing that a vet can do to help kittens survive at this age. If a kitten passes away while in your care, please wrap them in a paper towel and place them in a ziploc bag in your freezer until your foster coordinator advises on the disposal procedure.

# How Do I Attempt to Revive A Non-Responsive Newborn Kitten?

VCA Canada advises to try the following if a kitten is born non responsive and mom is not paying attention to it:

Tear the membranes from the nose, wipe the nose, open the mouth, tilt the kitten's head down and clear away any fluids.

If the umbilical cord has not broken on delivery, tear it an inch from the kitten and remove the bulk of the membranes. Complicated cutting and tying of the cord are unnecessary. The queen would chew through it, providing a blunt crushing action to prevent bleeding; you can do the same thing by tearing it between your first two fingers and thumb.

If the kitten is not breathing, or if it was delivered tail first and possibly inhaled fluid, it is necessary to clear debris and fluid from the air passages. The back of the mouth can be suctioned using a pediatric bulb syringe or Argyle™ DeLee mucus trap to clear away fluids while the kitten is rubbed vigorously. **“Swinging” kittens to remove fluid is no longer recommended as it can cause severe brain trauma.** The color of the kitten's tongue is a reliable indicator of success. If the kitten is receiving sufficient oxygen, the tongue will be pink; if not it will have a bluish tint.

Next, stimulate breathing by briskly stroking and rubbing the kitten with a clean, dry towel. If the kitten begins regular breathing, continue to dry it off briskly with the towel.

If it is not breathing, some further form of artificial respiration may be necessary. Mouth to mouth resuscitation is probably the most useful if carried out carefully. There are several essential points to remember. First, you should never blow fluids and debris further down the respiratory tract; you must first clear away these secretions by suction.

Second, the capacity of kitten lungs compared to a human is quite tiny. Blow small puffs of air into the mouth very gently and allow a pause for expiration. Repeat this cycle every three to five seconds. Ideally, use a short drinking straw to blow through since this is more hygienic and reduces the risk of damaging the kitten's lungs by over-inflation.

## What Happens If A Kitten Dies During or After Birth?

There is a fairly high mortality rate in kittens, especially within the first four weeks. In most cases we do not know the mother's history and it is unlikely that she has received adequate prenatal care and nutrition. If you feel your kittens are fading or they begin passing away, please contact the foster emergency email & your Foster Coordinator.

There is very little that can be done, but they will provide you with supportive home care suggestions. There is nothing that a vet can do to help kittens survive at this age. If a kitten passes away while in your care, please wrap them in a paper towel and place them in a Ziploc bag in your freezer until your foster coordinator advises on the disposal procedure.



# MOM & KITTENS

Fostering a mom cat with kittens is an exciting and rewarding job. You will get to see intimately how a mom cat cares for her kittens as well as the stages of development in their relationship.

## What type of setting do they need?

A calm one! Instinct tells mom cats to keep their kittens safe and, to feel safe, they need privacy, quiet, and minimal activity. Stress can cause cats to become aggressive, not to take care of their babies properly, and, in some instances, even causes extreme behaviours such as cannibalism. Your role is to give the mom cat an environment where she can feel comfortable raising her young.

Every household that intends to foster a mom cat with kittens should have a separate room away from the hub of daily activity. A home with no other pets is ideal, but if you do have pets, you should be able to prevent your pet from going up to the door of the fostering room.



We recommend that foster homes not have a dog unless it is a very mellow and quiet dog. If your home environment is loud or active, such as with young children, you may want to consider a different type of foster.



# Home Introduction

You will need to set up the room for your foster mom and babies before you let any of them out of the carrier. Ideally, you should do this before you get the mom and litter. This room should have one or two larger “safe spaces” or nests, boxes on their sides, an empty litter box lined with towels, etc.

Mom will want to choose somewhere to keep her kittens. Do not pet Momma Cat or make too many advances when you first release her from the carrier. Leave her alone with her kittens to explore her new home. Adult cats can take a few days to adjust to new places, and mom cats are no exception.

## Litter Box

Ideally, the litter box will be as far away from the food and water as possible. It should have a biodegradable litter in it (not clay), be scooped at least two times a day, and be dumped out once weekly. Once the kittens start using the litter box, you will need to add low-sided boxes that are easy for the kittens to get in and out of, and clean more frequently.

## Socialization

Proceed slowly with any adult cat you do not know—let her come to you, pet her only as much as she is comfortable with, and stop petting at the first signs of discomfort.

These signs may include: swishing tail, ears laid back or to the sides, head jerk towards your hand or the area where you were petting her, tensing up, cranky overdrawn meow, moving away, hissing, or growling.

Even a momma cat needs playtime. Make sure to have solo-play toys and interactive play sessions with mom. After kittens are 2-3 weeks old, she may show more interest.

# Mom's Care Of The Kittens

For the first few weeks of life, the mother cat should do everything necessary for the kittens. After that, you can start sharing some of the kitten care duties with her, if she is willing! Below is an explanation of the routine care a mom cat gives to her kittens, with an approximate timeline so you will know what behaviours to expect. All cats are slightly different, with some being more attentive moms than others; if a mom cat fails to care for her babies in any of these essential functions, let your Foster Coordinator know as soon as possible.

**Nursing kittens** begin to nurse 1-2 hours after birth. Though born with their eyes closed, they can find their mother by her warmth, and she should make this easier by lying near them on her side.

The nursing/suckling relationship occurs over three stages:

- 1** At first, the mother cat initiates each nursing episode, waking the kittens by licking them and then encircling them with her body. After a bit of searching, kittens quickly latch on. Nursing kittens should begin to nurse almost immediately after birth. Though born with their eyes closed, they can find their mother by her warmth, and she should make this easier by lying near them on her side.
- 2** The second stage occurs in the second or third week when the kitten's eyes and ears function. At this stage, they interact with their mother both inside and outside the nest. Kittens are now able to initiate some of the nursing episodes. The mother cat cooperates by lying down and taking up the nursing position.
- 3** In the third stage, at about five weeks postpartum, the kittens initiate virtually all nursing. Typically, the mother becomes gradually more evasive and uncooperative. Near the end of this stage, the mother begins to wean her kittens by becoming less and less available. In the wild cats, this is the time when the mother cat would start to provide them with freshly killed prey. You can help in the weaning process by encouraging the kittens to eat canned (puréed or mousse) and, later, dry food.

**TIP:**

A low-rimmed bowl helps the kittens reach the food easier while helping to keep some of the food in the bowl as they push it around.

**Grooming kittens** receive a lot of grooming and licking from their mothers during their first 2-4 weeks. This anogenital grooming stimulates elimination, and the mom consumes the fecal matter and urine. This keeps the nest and babies clean. Later, as the young kittens leave the nest area, the anogenital licking subsides, and the young deposit feces and urine nearby. At this point, providing low-sided litter boxes nearby will teach them to use the litter box. You generally do not need to intervene at this point. If you notice Mom not cleaning a dirty bottom, wipe with a damp cloth. Mom should be keeping the kittens clean. If you notice milk build up around their mouths, wipe away with a damp cloth

**TIP:**

A paper plate with biodegradable litter provides an opportunity for young kittens to acclimate to litter and is easy for them to access.

## Problem behaviours

### Maternal neglect

About 8% of kittens die from inadequate maternal care. The deaths are usually due to hypothermia if the kitten strays away and is not retrieved, or improper or inadequate nursing at birth and after. Maternal neglect has several causes – some cats seem to lack maternal instincts. In some cases, it is nature's way: if kittens have congenital disabilities or are otherwise weak at birth, the mom may ignore them or cannibalize them.

In many cases, it seems that environmental stress plays a role, and thus it is imperative that the environment be kept quiet, calm, warm and with few visits. Cats should primarily be left alone the first two weeks postpartum except to feed, clean, and check in on the kittens briefly a few times per day. You will need to watch them daily for signs that a mother cat neglects her young, especially in the first few weeks.

## Did you know?

- Newborn kittens who are crying are hungry.
- If the mother cat is neglecting her newborns, it is important to keep the kittens warm. Hot water bottles, heating pads, and warm blankets can help with this.



## Contact your Foster Coordinator if:

- The mother spends all her time away from the kittens
- She does not groom or nurse them frequently
- The kittens cry, and she does not seem to respond

## Maternal aggression towards other animals

Aggressive behaviour towards cats or dogs is typical in mother cats, as they instinctively protect their young. Please block any avenues they may have for seeing other cats or dogs, and strictly enforce separation from your resident pets. Please do not try to introduce your foster cat to other animals; this can be very stressful and offers no advantages.

If, for some reason, the mom cat sees another animal and is upset, quickly remove the source of anxiety (cover-up window, etc.) and leave the room. Do not attempt to comfort or reassure the mother cat or babies. Come back in 20 minutes or so to check on them.

### TIP:

Draft blockers to keep resident cats from poking paws under the door to say hello to the new mom cat and kittens.



## Maternal aggression towards people

Occasionally, mother cats have strong protective instincts against humans as well. They may hiss, growl, or strike out if you approach the kittens. We try to screen for these behaviours, but sometimes they develop down the line. If faced with this situation, move very slowly around the mom cat and the nest. Wear a long-sleeved sweatshirt to protect yourself as you clean around her. Try to bribe her with tasty treats such as chicken baby food or CHURU treats. Speak in a soft, reassuring voice, and try not to react if the mom cat hisses or growls. Do not make eye contact with her as she will see it as a threat. DO NOT correct the cat by spraying her with water or other types of correction. Remember, she is acting out of instinct to protect her young, and if you present in a threatening way, her behaviour may escalate. Contact your Foster Coordinator at the first sign of maternal aggression.

### TIP:

Check on the kittens when you feed wet food to momma cat. Talking to momma cat when you are in the room without doing any kitten/cat care-related tasks is also helpful.

After the first week, it helps momma cat feel comfortable if you spend some time in the room just being quietly present, like sitting in the room and reading a book.



# HEALTH

Due to the environment (shelter or worse) they have come from and the fact that they have very frail immune systems, kittens are prone to catching colds and other illnesses. These illnesses range from mild to life-threatening in nature. Kittens in the rescue system have an added disadvantage of not receiving maternally derived antibodies, their immune system is very fragile. Despite best efforts, they have a high mortality rate.

Healthy kittens have a lot of energy when they are awake. They are playful and will only spend a short time in your lap. Their eyes and nose should be generally free of any discharge. Their stool will be firm and well-shaped. Kittens eat a lot, but the amount they drink depends on how much wet food they consume (the more wet food, the less water). Kittens may sneeze occasionally. They may also scratch a little. These are normal kitten behaviours. It is not always obvious when kittens are sick. In nature, cats will hide any sickness so they don't appear vulnerable.



One of the best indicators of a healthy kitten is weight gain. Kittens should be weighed (and the weight recorded) every day until they are 500g, then every other day until they go for their spay/neuter surgery. Gains will vary but should be steady. A loss should be reported to your Foster Coordinator immediately; their response will depend on the age of the kitten. Weighing is especially important with nursing kittens where you cannot see how much they are eating. Just because they are latching on does not always mean they're getting enough nourishment.

# Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)

The most common illness seen in kittens is an upper respiratory infection (similar to the common cold in humans). URI is a contagious respiratory disease affecting domestic cats. It can be caused by several viruses and microorganisms which primarily affect the eyes, nose, and throat. Transmission of the disease occurs mainly from direct contact with the virus (found on fur, clothes, blankets, etc.) and rarely through aerosol droplets formed from a sneeze or cough.

When given a quiet room to sleep in along with a healthy diet and plenty of TLC, cats recover from their infection more quickly than they do at a shelter, although more vulnerable animals, such as young kittens or malnourished, stressed cats, are at risk of succumbing to the illness.

It is important for you to contact your Foster Coordinator if the kitten(s) develops yellow, brown or green nasal or ocular discharge, wet cough, or if it loses its appetite, as this may indicate a secondary bacterial infection and require antibiotic treatment.

## Symptoms of URI

- Lethargy
- Intermittent sneezing or sneezing attacks
- Dry cough
- Drooling
- Nasal discharge
- Watery eyes; eyelids may paste shut in kittens
- Congestion - snorting sounds, open-mouth breathing and wheezing
- Sensitivity to light
- Disinterest in food

For more information on common illnesses please visit [www.Meowapedia.com](http://www.Meowapedia.com)

# Calicivirus

Feline Calicivirus is one of the most common viruses for upper respiratory infections and oral disease. It is highly contagious and infected cats can shed the virus in saliva or secretions from the nose or eyes.

The virus may survive for up to one week in a contaminated environment (and possibly longer in a cool, damp location). Clinical signs are typically the same as URI's however the virus will also cause lesions or ulcers on the cats tongue, making it painful for them to eat.

We strongly recommend all resident cats are up to date with FVRCP vaccine to prevent transmission.

## Symptoms of Calicivirus and Other Viral Infections

- Lethargy or Listlessness
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (may contain blood)
- Ulcers in mouth/on tongue
- Dehydration
- Shivering and/or fever
- Dull and rough coats





# Tips on Care

## Lower stress levels

Provide the cat with a warm and well-ventilated room where she can rest quietly. This is more relevant to adult cats, but can apply to nervous kittens as well. Do not separate kittens as they would all have been exposed



## Monitor food intake

Cats with URI may not be interested in eating due to their overall feeling of malaise and congestion, which hinders their sense of smell. However, their recovery relies on nourishment, so they should be encouraged to eat. Adding a bit of warm water to canned food to form a paste may entice the cat to eat. If that does not work, try feeding “stinky food” such as canned tuna, salmon, or gravy-based cat food. In some cases, hand-feeding is required in several small intervals throughout the day. If antibiotics are prescribed, follow the directions on the label and always be sure to complete the cycle of medication, even if your foster appears fully recovered.



## Clean the kitten's face

Use a soft cloth, paper towel or gauze pad dampened with warm water to clean encrustations around the nose and eyes. Always use a new gauze pad or paper towel for each eye.

## Help ease her breathing

Your foster's sinuses may become increasingly congested as the URI progresses. Adding a humidifier or vaporizer to her room or bringing her into the bathroom and closing the door while you take a hot shower may help. Remember that as long as the cat continues to eat and doesn't vomit or have diarrhea, your foster is likely on the mend!

## Keep the environment clean

Wash bedding often, clean dishes every day, wash surfaces as much as possible (soap and water, nothing harsher until prepping for your next fosters).

# Other common health issues

Symptom	Possible cause	What to do
Eyes Clear discharge	Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the mucous membrane covering the anterior (front) portion of the eyelid.  If you see clear discharge, it is a viral infection therefore no treatment is required.	Monitor the eyes. If the discharge is excessive or progresses to a yellow or green colour, please contact us.
Eyes Green or yellow discharge	If you see yellow or green discharge, it is most likely a bacterial infection and should be treated.	Gently wipe the eyes with a warm, damp cloth. Please contact us for further direction.
Eyes Third eyelid exposed	Cats have a third eyelid, called a nictitating membrane, which is usually hidden. Its function is to remove dust or other irritants from the eye.	If you can see this membrane for more than 24 hours, please contact us.

Symptom	Possible cause	What to do
Vomiting	While vomiting can be common in adult cats, it's unusual in kittens. In very young kittens it can be a sign of worms. Persistent vomiting is an emergency.	If a kitten vomits once, contact your Foster Coordinator (FC) for deworming treatment.  If a kitten vomits multiple times in a day, contact your FC immediately for advice.
<u>Diarrhea</u>	Diarrhea is one of the most common ailments affecting animals and it has many causes. Cow's milk often causes diarrhea in cats and kittens. Other causes of diarrhea include stress, allergy to food, parasites, improper absorption of food or change in food, and some diseases.	Kittens cannot wait for treatment as they become dehydrated very quickly. Contact us as soon as you notice diarrhea.  TCR has developed a diarrhea protocol for kittens; discuss with your FC.
Sneezing and/or nasal discharge	Sneezing and nasal discharge are commonly found in cats who are suffering from an upper respiratory infection.	Monitor sneezing and contact us if sneezing fits increase or worsen, or if nasal discharge is yellow or green.

## Injuries

Kittens can be rambunctious and adventurous. Occasionally, through no one's fault, kittens get injured. Report any injuries – especially limping – to your FC immediately.

In addition to kitten proofing for escape holes, kitten proof for injury prevention as well, including blocking off stairs and banisters. Cages often have bars spaces that, while safe for adult cats, can catch kittens' heads or limbs. Climbing trees may be too tall for small kittens.

Exercise caution with string/elastic toys. They can get wrapped around necks and limbs.

# Common Parasites

Intestinal Parasite	Description and symptoms	Treatment
Roundworm (not zoonotic)	Roundworm is the most common worm in both dogs and cats. They live in the stomach and intestinal tract, and resemble thin spaghetti. Heavy infestation causes animals to appear thin and pot-bellied.	De-worming with oral medication.  Please contact us if you notice worms around the anal region, or in stool or vomit.
Tapeworm (not zoonotic)	Tapeworms have a flat, white, rice-like appearance. They rarely produce well-defined symptoms but, in the cases of a heavy infestation of a malnourished animal, may include dullness, irritability, increased appetite, dry and harsh coat, or mild diarrhea. It is important to know that tapeworm cannot be directly transmitted to your own animals.	De-worming with oral medication.  Please contact us if you notice worms around the animal's anal region, or in stool or vomit.
Hookworm (not zoonotic)	The hookworm is approximately ½" to 1" (1-2 cm) long. It attaches to the small intestine lining, where it feeds on blood. Hookworms can cause severe anemia in infected cats. The infective larvae can enter the host either by mouth or through the skin, particularly the feet. Eczema and secondary bacterial infection can occur due to irritation as they burrow through the skin.	De-worming with oral medication.  Please contact your FC if you notice any skin inflammation.
Coccidia (not zoonotic)	Coccidia is a microscopic parasite that lives in the intestines preventing the absorption of nutrients and can cause vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration and weight loss or difficulty gaining weight.	Oral medication is required and a thorough cleaning of the environment.
Giardia (potentially zoonotic)	Giardia is a microscopic parasite that lives in the intestines and can cause vomiting and diarrhea. Weight loss or difficulty gaining weight can also be a sign since the parasite prevents the absorption of nutrients.	Oral medication is required and a thorough cleaning of the environment.



External Parasite	Description and symptoms	Treatment
Ticks (zoonotic - transmissible to humans)	Most common to dogs, ticks are small rounded arachnids that attach to one spot and do not move. Once they insert their head under the skin, they begin engorging themselves on the blood of the host.	Please do not try to remove the tick yourself.  If you see a tick on your foster, please contact us.
Fleas (not zoonotic)	Fleas are the most common external parasite that is found on the skin of cats and dogs. An adult flea is a dark brown insect that can be seen on the animal's skin along with their eggs and flea feces (black specks).	All cats and dogs are given a flea treatment soon after their arrival at the shelter.  Please contact us if you notice excessive scratching.
Lice (not zoonotic)	Lice are off-white and approximately 1/10" long. Their irritation causes infected animals to scratch excessively. Lice are host-specific and do not transmit to people or animals of a different species.	Treatment requires routine shampooing.  Please contact us if you notice excessive scratching.
Ear mites (not zoonotic)	Ear mites are highly contagious tiny, white parasites that live on the surface of the ear canal producing a flaky, dark brown, and sometimes waxy discharge in the ear canal, often described as "like coffee grounds". Infected animals will shake their heads and scratch or rub their ears.	Application of a topical millbemite and routine ear cleaning.  Please contact us if you notice the animal shaking its head or scratching its ears excessively.
Ringworm (zoonotic - transmissible to humans)	Ringworm is a highly contagious fungal disease that produces dry, scaly, hairless patches around the ear flaps, face, or toenails. While ringworm does not usually itch, advanced cases may produce scabs and lesions that the animal may lick and scratch.	If you suspect your foster has ringworm, quarantine all foster kittens together and limit handling, wash your hands thoroughly, and contact us immediately.

# Additional Health Concerns

## Dehydration

Dehydration caused by GI upset or diarrhea is one of the leading causes of kitten deaths.

Symptoms include:

- unresponsiveness
- sunken eyes
- lethargy
- prolonged skin tent
- tacky mucous membranes
- loss of appetite

## Temperature

Neonates should normally have a rectal temperature of about 36-37 celsius. Once they reach over 4 weeks their temperature will increase to 38 celsius. Fevers can occur when a kitten is working through an infection.





# RESOURCES

 [TORONTO CAT RESCUE](#)

 [MEOWAPEDIA](#)

 [ASPCA](#)

 [VCA CANADA](#)

 [KITTEN LADY](#)

 [TINY KITTENS](#)

 [CORNELL UNIVERSITY](#)

 [ROYAL CANIN](#)

 [NATIONAL KITTEN  
COALITION](#)



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