VCAS Foster Care Program

Neonatal Kitten Manual

Make sure to join the VCAS Foster Families Facebook Group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/475516222635437/
VCAS Neonatal Kitten Fostering

Thank you for fostering these neonatal kittens until they are one and a half pounds in weight and ready to come back to the shelter.

Sometimes, we get in neonatal puppies that need fostering, just not as often as the kittens. The information in this manual will apply to both, with slight adjustments for the puppies.

You must keep any resident animals separate from the kittens, and you should always wash your hands before and after handling the kittens.

Please use the following information to guide you through the next few weeks. Once the kitten or puppy is eating on its own, please refer to the VCAS Foster Kitten or Puppy Manual for additional guidelines on general care, revaccinations, disinfecting protocols, and other foster information. Providing your kittens with proper nutrition and care will help them become healthy and ready to be adopted into new homes!

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You will need the following supplies:

- A supply of clean towels for bedding
- Snuggle Safe heat disc or warming rice bag*
- Cotton gauze & tissues
- Heating pad*
- Lots of time, patience, and love!

*Please be aware that there needs to be enough space so the kittens are able to move off of the heat if they become overheated.

The VCAS Foster Program will provide the following:

- A plastic carrier to keep the kittens in
- Infant nipple bottles
- KMR kitten formula
- An accurate scale to monitor the weight of the kittens (limited supplies)
Preventing and Caring for Your Kittens

Keeping the Kittens Safe and Warm

The greatest single danger to the neonatal kitten is hypothermia, or getting cold. A kitten that is separated from its mother will not live long without human intervention. When apart from its mother, a kitten has no way to maintain its own body temperature. If a kitten feels cold to the touch, hypothermia has set in, and its condition is critical at this point. Call the Foster Tech and Emergency Line immediately.

Warming a chilled kitten:
- Wrap the kitten in a towel or blanket. Wrap a hot water bottle or heating disc in a towel and place it next to the kitten.
- Gently begin massaging the kitten to restore circulation.

Housing the Kittens

You will need to house the kittens properly:
- Kittens should be kept in a large carrier or crate away from drafts and cold.
- A heating disc or warming rice bag wrapped in a towel should be placed inside so that it covers part of one side and only part of the bottom of the box; this way the kittens can crawl onto it when they get cold and off of it when they get too warm. Cover the disk/rice bag to keep it warmer for longer.
- Clean towels/fleece should also be put in the box for bedding along with a stuffed animal to snuggle with.
- When the kittens are 3-4 weeks old you can put a small litter box into a small play space that they can hang out in and get exposure to a litter box, toys, and food at bottle time. They are usually only awake to ‘play’ and explore for 10-20 minutes after feeding. After play time they should return to their carrier to keep warm until they are closer to 4 weeks.

Handling the Kittens

- Regular gentle handling of kittens is important for socializing them.
- Handle the kittens for only several minutes at a time — too much handling at one time can be stressful. Repeat this short handling session often to encourage socialization!
- If you see fleas or flea dirt on the kittens, you should call or email the Foster Coordinator so we can make sure that the kittens have received flea medication.
- A flea comb can be used to help keep the kittens clean. It also mimics the soothing effect of a mom’s tongue.
Feeding Your Kittens

Time to Eat!

Kittens under 4 weeks of age will need a kitten formula. Here at VCAS, Kitten Milk Replacer, KMR is provided. It is also available in many pet stores. Never feed your kittens cow’s milk!!! Cow’s milk can cause diarrhea, which could quickly dehydrate a kitten.

The KMR needs to be reconstituted with water. Please read the directions carefully; once you reconstitute the powder, the formula needs to be refrigerated and is only good for 24 hours.

When feeding a single kitten, we suggest you start with mixing 2 tablespoons of formula with 4 tablespoons of warm water. It’s best to start each feeding with fresh formula and a washed bottle and nipple.

NEVER FEED A CHILLED OR COLD KITTEN — THIS CAN KILL THE KITTEN!

A kitten is unable to digest food when it is chilled. Do not attempt to feed if the body temperature is less than 94 degrees F. Slowly warm the neonate to 97-98 degrees F over several hours if necessary (See section above on “Warming a chilled kitten”). Once warmed, encourage nursing.

The amount of food to give depends on how much the kitten wants to suckle. The chart below is a good guideline using the age and weight of the kitten, but it really comes down to appetite and hardiness of the kitten. We will go over the particular kittens’ schedule(s) when you come to pick up the kitten(s), and remember to be flexible in the feeding schedule to accommodate for individual needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Average Weight</th>
<th>Amount of Formula per Day</th>
<th>Feedings per Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 week</td>
<td>2-4 oz</td>
<td>32 cc</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>4 oz</td>
<td>32 cc</td>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>7 oz</td>
<td>56 cc</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>10 oz</td>
<td>80 cc</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>13 oz</td>
<td>104 cc</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Time to Eat!

Warm the formula to body temperature by immersing the bottle in hot water — **do not place kitten formula in microwave.**

- How you hold the kitten during feeding is very important. Hold them horizontally with their bellies facing down and their heads tilted slightly up for feeding. Never squirt formula into their mouths or hold them on their backs because this could get formula into their lungs and cause them to aspirate, which might lead to death.

- Keep the bottle at a 45-degree angle to keep the nipple full of formula and not air. Encourage suckling by keeping a slight pull on the bottle.

- Remember to never force the kittens to eat. If they don’t want to eat, try again in an hour or so.

- Feed every 3-6 hours depending on the kitten’s age. In order to be a good caretaker, you must get some sleep yourself. It is best to do as late a feeding as possible, between 12-1am and then when you first wake up, hopefully between 6:30-7:30am. During your waking hours, try to keep a feeding schedule, this will help both you and your kittens’ sleeping habits.

- At 3 weeks of age, depending on the kitten you can start to offer them a diet of moistened food mixture or gruel. Place the gruel in a shallow bowl and encourage the kittens to eat by smearing some gruel on the kitten’s lips. Try to offer the food before the bottle, so that the kitten is hungry. Neonatal puppies tend to get off the bottle sooner and are not as picky about food as kittens, so they may be ready to eat gruel by 3 weeks of age.

- By 4 or 5 weeks of age, the kittens should be eating more on their own. There is always a kitten or two that just won’t “get off the bottle.” Don’t be discouraged, continue to offer wet food, if not eating, continue with bottle-feeding, just not as often. Be patient, they all do finally learn to eat solid food!

- Once solid food is given you need not measure nor restrict the amount — kittens seldom overeat!

- Kittens eating solid food should have lots of fresh water available in a shallow dish.
Time to Go to the Bathroom!

Without a mom cat around you must help your kittens to eliminate its waste. You must stimulate each kitten to urinate and defecate after you feed him/her. Evidence shows that kittens less than 14 days of age cannot eliminate spontaneously. While your kittens are less than two weeks old, stimulate them to eliminate before and after each feeding, this will also help keep your carrier cleaner.

Here's how to stimulate a kitten to eliminate:

- Use a cotton ball, gauze, or toilet paper.
- You may need to moisten it with warm water, but most times the kitten will start as soon as you rub.
- Gently stroke the anal and genital areas of each kitten as soon as you have fed it. In most cases, each kitten will urinate and defecate in response to this stimulus. Some people find that it's helpful to stimulate a kitten before it eats, it can calm them and establish your bond with the kitten. Each kitten is different, so try both ways and figure out what is most productive for the kitten.
- Wipe away waste and return the kitten to its clean bed.
- If the kitten does not eliminate in response to gentle stimulation, put it back in its bed. Try again to stimulate it to eliminate after you have fed its littermates. If it still does not defecate and urinate, do not continue to rub the kitten until you have irritated its anal area. Put it back into its bed and try again later.
- It will be necessary for you to continue to stimulate the kitten until he/she can eliminate on his/her own — usually at three weeks of age.
If the Kittens Start to Get Sick

- Intestinal worms, coccidiosis (an intestinal parasite), upper respiratory viruses, and eye infections are often found in orphaned kittens.
- Diarrhea may occur with the new diet. Alert the foster department, if diarrhea worsens or persists for more than 24 hours.
- If your kittens sneeze, have discharge from their eyes, have diarrhea, or seem weak, you should call (805) 388-4464 and make an appointment to bring them in as soon as possible.

Kitten mortality: Many factors play a part in kitten mortality. Kittens born on the streets to malnourished or ill mothers risk congenital or inherited defects. Despite the best efforts at proper nutrition, emergency care, medical treatment, and detailed care, some kittens die. The death of a kitten can be an emotionally disturbing experience for the caretaker. It is important to understand and accept that some kittens will not survive. What we can do for these kittens is surround them with warmth and care, and make their passing as comfortable as possible.

But many of these kittens do survive and because of all the handling they get from their foster parents, they often develop strong bonds to people; making them highly adoptable. Fostering these little ones can be challenging, but the reward is knowing that you gave them the chance to grow and thrive so they could find their forever homes.

Thank you for caring for these little ones!
### Procedure for Emergencies

If Your Foster Is Having a Medical Emergency and neither the Foster Coordinator nor Volunteer Manager are available:

1. **VCAS Dispatch & Emergency Line:**
   - **(805) 388-4341**

2. Call the VCAS Dispatch and Emergency Line at (805) 388-4341

3. Ask to speak to a tech (make sure to get their name). Describe what's happening and they will let you know if you need to bring the animal in to VCAS infirmary right away or, if it is after hours, what else can be done.

4. If it is after hours and no tech is available call the Volunteer Program Manager at 805-765-8590 up until 10pm, for directions. If authorized, you will be given the name of an emergency vet to which you may take your foster animal.

5. Please know that if you choose to take your foster animal to any veterinarian without prior authorization you will be solely responsible for any financial costs associated with the visit.

6. If you are authorized to take the foster animal to an emergency vet, make sure to get a copy of the treatment sheet before leaving. Information on this sheet is important for future follow up treatment at VCAS infirmary.

7. **Call the Foster Coordinator or one of the VCAS Technicians** the next morning and let them know what happened. The foster animal will probably need to come in to VCAS for a recheck.

### Foster Care Phone Numbers & Emails

**Foster Care Coordinator**
- **(805) 388-4464**
- VCAR.Foster@ventura.org

**Medical Appointments**
- **Sick & Revaccination Appts**
  - Monday – Sunday
  - 10:00am – 2:00pm

- **Spay/Neuter Appointments**
  - Schedule pick-ups and drop-offs.
  - Sunday - Thursday
  - 7:00 - 8:00 am drop off
  - 4:00 - 5:00 pm pick up

- The Foster Coordinator is not locked into these hours and may be able to help you at other times as well.

**OTHER NUMBERS**

**Volunteer Program Manager**
- **(805) 388-4345**
- VCAR.Volunteer@ventura.org

If the foster care coordinator cannot be reached during regular business hours.
- **(805) 765-5890 until 10pm**

**Dispatch & Emergency Line**
- **(805) 388-4341**
- 24 Hours/Day, 7 Days/Week
  - To get advice about the urgency of a situation.