



# FOSTER KITTEN HANDBOOK

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome .....	2
Guidelines .....	3
Introduction to Kittens .....	3
Weight .....	3
Temperature .....	4
Eyes and Ears .....	4
Hygiene .....	4
Nestbox .....	5
Feeding .....	5
Feeding Quantities .....	6
Feeding Bottle Babies .....	6
Weaning Kittens onto Solids .....	7
Kitten Care .....	8
Nursing Mothers .....	8
Mothers with Kittens .....	9
Active or “Regular” Kittens .....	9
Stimulation for Urination / Defecation .....	10
Litter Box Training .....	10
Socialization .....	11
Basic Play .....	11
Shy Kittens .....	11
Rough Play .....	12
Destructive Scratching .....	12
Feral Kittens .....	13
Medical Emergencies .....	13
Common Medical Ailments and Illnesses .....	15
External Parasites .....	15
Intestinal Parasites .....	15
Ringworm .....	16
Dehydration .....	16
Diarrhea .....	16
Vomiting .....	17
Conjunctivitis .....	17
Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) .....	17
Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) .....	17
Fading Kittens .....	18
Losing a Kitten or Kittens .....	18
Supplies .....	19
Household Hazards .....	20

## WELCOME

Thank you for offering to serve as a foster parent for our community's homeless kittens! You are literally a lifesaver.

Kittens under the age of eight weeks are too young for our adoption program and require specialized care in a foster home. Caring for tiny kittens is much like caring for human babies. Depending on their age, they may require bottle feedings every few hours, assistance with elimination, temperature regulation and socialization. However, proper care for these babies can easily be learned and the rewards are endless!

During the spring in Spokane, hundreds of kittens are born to stray and feral moms. Many of these kittens end up in shelters because the mom is unable to care for them. This is where foster parents step in. Fostering kittens is basically recreating the job of the mom- feeding, pottyng, grooming, and providing lots of love!

This handbook will answer most questions new foster parents may have about caring for very young kittens. Some foster kittens will need to be bottle fed, and some can eat regular food. It depends on their age and general health. All kittens will need to be socialized (handled with tender, loving care) and some kittens will need extra help in this area as they were born in the wild.

The medical history that you receive along with your kittens will tell you when to return them to the clinic for care. We spay or neuter kittens at two pounds and they can be adopted after they are spayed or neutered. Kittens are most adoptable when they are young and cute, so we would like to offer them for adoption as soon as they are ready. It is hard to part with kittens you have nurtured, but because of you, they will find their forever family and you can save more lives with a new litter!

If you have health or behavioral concerns about your kittens, please call SpokAnimal's Foster Care Coordinator at (509) 534-8133 ext. 215 or email [foster@spokanimal.org](mailto:foster@spokanimal.org). If you have a medical emergency after shelter hours, please call (509) XXX-XXXX or (509) XXX-XXXX.

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## GUIDELINES

- Maintain an initial two week quarantine period as foster kittens may have been exposed to illness.
- Fragile newborn foster kittens should not be handled by children. Once the kittens can walk and play on their own, children who are supervised closely and taught proper handling techniques can handle the kittens.
- It is best for foster volunteers to have a maximum of two litters of kittens at a time in order to provide the best care and to keep from getting overwhelmed. Each litter of kittens should be kept separate until everyone is healthy and has gone through the quarantine period.
- Foster volunteers will bring the kittens to the shelter for their vaccines and boosters every two weeks, and for medical check-ups as needed.
- Foster kittens are ready to have spay/neuter surgery and are available for adoption when they are healthy and weigh two pounds. The foster parent must contact the Foster Care Coordinator to schedule surgery appointments.

## INTRODUCTION TO KITTENS

### WEIGHT

Healthy kittens weigh about three to four ounces at birth and quickly gain weight, doubling their birth weight by one week old. We like to see a weight gain of about one-half ounce a day for young kittens. Below is an average kitten weights based on age:

Age	Weight
At birth	90-110 g
1 week	180-220 g
2 weeks	270-320 g
3 weeks	350 g
4 weeks	450 g
5 weeks	550 g
6 weeks	650 g
7 weeks	750 g
8 weeks	1.7 – 2.0 lbs (800-900 g)

Keeping a tab on weight increase is key to making sure kittens are thriving. Kittens should be weighed daily for the first two weeks, and then weighed every three days until they are one month old.

## TEMPERATURE

The average temperature of newborn kittens will be 96-100 degrees F. Normal temperatures are 96-99 degrees F for newborn to two weeks, 98-100 degrees F at two to four weeks, and 100-101 degrees F at four to six weeks. Newborn kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature. They have little body fat and immature circulatory systems and are dependent upon their mother, or an artificial heat source for warmth. Without outside warmth, kittens can only maintain a body temperature of about 95 degrees F. It's up to either cat mom or surrogate mom (you!) to insure that the newborn does not become hypothermic. Hypothermia can have devastating effects on newborn kittens as they can develop potentially life threatening low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) due to the decrease in body temperature. However, warming too quickly is also dangerous. Keeping a consistent warm temperature is key to caring for these babies.

Keep the kittens in a place that is warm, draft-free, and isolated from small children and your own pets, particularly cats. Place the kittens on a heating pad on the low setting under a heavy towel. Be very careful to place adequate padding between the kittens and the heating pad to avoid burns. Be sure to tuck the towel under the pad so the kittens cannot crawl between the towel and the pad. Place kittens and pad in a box, cat carrier, or other confinement that is large enough for the kittens to move off the pad if they become too warm.

## EYES AND EARS

Kittens are born with closed eyes and closed ear canals and cannot see or hear during the early days of life. Typically, kittens begin to gain hearing capability between five to eight days of life and their eyes begin to open in the second week. By three weeks of age they should be able to fully see and hear the world around them.

## HYGIENE

As with all newborns, hygiene is extremely important. The spread of germs is an ongoing threat to kittens. To keep this spread to a minimum, make cleanliness a high priority.

Wash your hands before touching the kitten and before preparing food or feeding the kitten.

Living quarters should be cleaned every day. When cleaning, place the kittens in a separate (sanitizable) area until the living quarters are completely dry.

Keep all feeding equipment extremely clean. Sterilize all utensils before each feeding. Wash bottles, nipples, storage bottle and bottle brushes, etc., in hot soapy water and

rinse well. Bottles and nipples can also be placed in a pan of boiling water to sterilize them. Be sure to clean the plastic mixing / storage bottle thoroughly each 24 hours. If a film appears inside the bottle, use either a bottle brush made specifically for kitten bottles, or put 10-15 grains of dry rice in the bottle, with a drop of dishwashing liquid and a small bit of water; shake vigorously. The rice against the bottle will remove the film.

Keep the kittens clean and dry. The mother cat keeps them scrupulously clean. It is especially important to clean after the kittens have gone potty to remove feces and urine. Do not be afraid to give a kitten a bath or wipe with a warm wetted washcloth.

## NESTBOX

The nestbox, or area where you will keep the kittens, should be large enough for the kittens to move around, but not too much larger. All kittens should be kept together in the same crate. Small plastic airline crates work wonderfully for housing tiny kittens. Line the crate with newspapers or towels.

During the first week of life, the kitten housing area should be kept at a temperature between 85 and 90 degrees F. The temperature may then be lowered five degrees each week of life until 70 degrees F is reached. Make sure the crate is not near an open window or drafty area. If you choose to use a box without a top, make sure the sides are tall enough so that the kittens cannot crawl or fall out. Change the bedding in the box daily until the kittens start litter training.

## FEEDING

Underfeeding: Underfed kittens are equally at risk for complications. Kittens that are underfed are restless and cry excessively. They will eventually appear listless and apathetic. Eventually, these kittens will become dehydrated and chilled. If you think your foster kitten is suffering from underfeeding, make sure to check the amounts you are feeding and consult a Foster Care Coordinator for more guidance.

Overfeeding: Kittens have tiny stomachs and can only handle small amounts of food at each feeding. Overfeeding a kitten can cause diarrhea which can lead to dehydration and ultimately, if left untreated, death to the kitten.

Burping the Kitten: Always burp the kitten after each feeding. Do this by rubbing and patting the kitten's "back".

Chilled Kittens: Never feed a kitten that is cold as it cannot digest food when it is chilled. Wait until the kitten is sufficiently warmed up before feeding. Kittens can be warmed using microwave bags filled with corn or rice which are available commercially.

## FEEDING QUANTITIES

The following is a reference guide for feeding quantities based on weight (note these are averages):

Age in Weeks	Average. Weight	cc of Formula / Day	Feedings Per Day
1	4 oz.	32 cc	8 or more
2	7 oz.	56cc	8 or more
3	10 oz.	80cc	6
4	13 oz.	104 cc	4
5	1 lb.	128 cc	3

Also, as kittens grow they can let you know better when they are actually hungry. Kittens that are not getting enough nourishment may cry continuously, suck on each other or on themselves, and they may have prominent hips or backbones. Daily weight measurements are helpful to ensure kittens are eating enough and growing properly.

## FEEDING BOTTLE BABIES

**Bottle:** SpokAnimal will provide you with an animal nursing kit that includes a bottle, extra nipples, and a cleaning brush. Human baby bottles are not appropriate for feeding kittens. Cut a small “X” or poke a series of holes with a paperclip in the tip of your first nipple. You know that you have made the nipple opening just big enough if, when the bottle is held upside-down, formula drips slowly from it. Too small an opening will make the kittens work too hard to get their formula, tiring them out before they’ve had enough to eat. Too large an opening will force too much formula into them, too fast. If milk runs out of the hole in a stream, the hole is too big and can cause the kitten to aspirate milk into its lungs. Before each feeding, sterilize the bottles and nipples by boiling them in water.

**Formula:** **Never feed a kitten cow’s milk, goat’s milk or human baby formula!** Pet food stores and veterinarians carry feline formulas that contain closely matching nutrients to those in their mother’s milk. At SpokAnimal, we use KMR kitten formula, but there are other brands that are suitable as well.

The opened can of powdered KMR should be refrigerated as it is good for three months if kept cold. If kept in the freezer, an opened can of powder lasts six months. To save time, make up a 24-hour supply and keep it refrigerated. Any formula left over after 24 hours should be thrown out.

Formula should always be fed warm (approximately 101 degrees F). Warm the formula in the bottle in a pan of water. Do not microwave the formula; although you may microwave the water in a glass cup before placing the bottle in the water. Test a few

drops on the back of your hand to make sure it is warm but not hot. Do not allow the formula to boil. Any formula that boils must be thrown out, as the protein has been destroyed. Only heat as much formula as you think the kittens will drink. Any heated formula remaining should be discarded. Reheated formula can cause a bacterial infection.

Do not change the formula brand once you have started to avoid intestinal stress.

Bottle Feeding the Kitten: Start by covering your lap with a towel or blanket. Take the kitten in your lap and hold it upright. You want to feed it while it is on its stomach (not on its back like we feed human babies). Placing the kitten on its stomach helps prevent the milk from entering the windpipe – this is very important! Try to angle the bottle so that air does not go into the stomach. Encourage suckling by keeping a slight pull on the bottle. Be careful not to overfeed. Overfeeding can lead to diarrhea and other problems. You will usually see bubbles forming around the kitten's mouth when it's full.

If the kitten is sucking effectively, the ears move in rhythm to the sucking. Open the mouth gently with the tip of your finger and slip the nipple in. Once your kitten gets the hang of it, they will search out the nipple enthusiastically! You will feel a real "vacuum effect" when the kitten gets into suckle mode. The kitten should be allowed to suck at its own pace. If a kitten refuses to take the nipple or won't suckle, try rubbing it vigorously on its forehead or stroking its back. This replicates the activity of a mom cat's cleaning and can effectively stimulate the kitten to nurse. Sometimes you will hear a "clicking" noise which means the kitten's nursing instinct is in gear and should be ready for the nipple. Sometimes a kitten is simply picky; there are two kinds of nipples out there, one shorter and one longer, so you might have to make sure they don't prefer one or the other. Syringe feeding works just as well.

## WEANING KITTENS ONTO SOLIDS

Weaning is the process of teaching the kittens to eat on their own. This occurs at about three to four weeks of age. Individual kittens in the same litter may wean at different times, so don't be discouraged if one or two refuses to leave the bottle at first. Some take up to eight weeks – often those kittens who crave the one-on-one attention they get from the bottle. You will know that a kitten is ready for the weaning process when it is (a) biting its nipple often and forcefully, and (b) able to lick formula from your finger.

Place a shower curtain liner underneath a large towel or towels to catch the inevitable mess while your kittens are learning to eat.

You may start mixing in soft canned food with the formula and offering it in a shallow bowl to begin the weaning process. Continue to bottle feed until you are certain they are eating well on their own. Begin offering hard kitten kibble at this age as well, they may



surprise you! Young animals that have been separated from their mothers too soon often lack the instinct to eat from a bowl and need some encouragement. Here are some tips: Watering food down, heating it up and offering it directly to their lips with your finger or a spoon may sometimes give them the idea. Kittens at or under one pound need to be encouraged to eat at least every four hours and weighed daily to ensure weight gain.

If the kittens do not seem interested in canned kitten food, try canned chicken or tuna. Pouring the liquid from canned chicken or tuna onto other types of food will often work. Add more water to the can, refrigerate it and you'll have more "juice" ready for next time. Chicken, turkey or beef flavored baby food will often be an appealing consistency and flavor to kittens (no onion or garlic flavored food). Baby food is not a balanced diet for long term use in kittens, so use this only to encourage eating of kitten/cat food.

Plain fresh water should be available in a low, stable bowl at all times to the kittens, starting at three to four weeks. They may walk in it at first, that is normal, until they learn what it is.

You may need to continue supplementing their food intake with a bottle (or mom) while they are learning to eat. You can also start by offering just formula in a saucer to teach them to lap out of a dish. Over the course of about a week, slowly reduce the amount of formula to food ratio, until the kittens are eating only solid foods.

Kittens will learn to start grooming themselves and their litter mates by licking food off.

Please use the kitty food provided by SpokAnimal to insure consistency. Changes in diet can cause intestinal upsets and diarrhea. Diarrhea can be life-threatening to a kitten if left untreated.

## KITTEN CARE

### NURSING MOTHERS

Nursing mothers will do most of the work for you! They feed, bathe, stimulate and socialize their kittens. Kittens learn through observing their mother.

Your main responsibilities will be to observe everyone and make sure everything is going right.

Are all your kittens eating? You may need to give a particular kitten some one on one time with mom. If you do so, make sure to keep the other kittens warm while mom's

away. If mom is still not working with her kitten, you may have to supplement that particular kitten with some formula.

Some moms may be very protective of their babies. Start slowly. When you bring her home, give her a chance to get settled in. You may just want to sit next to your mom and litter and observe at first. Blinking your eyes towards mom shows that you do not have any aggression towards her. Start by softly petting mom. Once she seems comfortable with you (this may take some time), then start petting her kittens. Slowly start to pick up the kittens, but do not remove them out of mom's eyesight. You will gradually work your way up to being able to handle her kittens with her trusting you with her precious ones.

Most moms, after a while, need a break! Allow mom to get away from her kittens. If you have them crated, have a door open that the kittens cannot get out of to allow mom to get away for some quiet time or one on one time with you. If you are using a box, same thing.

## MOTHERS WITH KITTENS

If you get a litter of kittens with a mother cat, you are in luck! She will do most, if not all, of the care necessary for the kittens and teach them everything they need to know to be awesome cats, from eating dry food to using the litter box to soliciting attention from humans. It is important to have a warm, comfortable place for mom to nurse her babies, but it is equally as important to give her space to stretch her legs. A bathroom with the small kittens set up in the bathtub is ideal because she can easily hop out of the tub to get some alone time. Like her kittens, mother cats should never go outside while in foster care. While she is nursing, be sure to have water, wet food, and dry food available to her at all times because almost all of her calories will be spent feeding her babies. Because of this, nursing queens can be lethargic but otherwise healthy. You should still be aware of dehydration, rapid weight loss, lack of appetite, or severe lethargy, which indicate illness. If you have a sick mother cat, she might not produce enough milk for her babies and/or not want to care for them. You might also have a mother cat that is not interested in caring for her babies for whatever reason; in these cases, you will have to supplement with bottle feeding and other care.

## ACTIVE OR "REGULAR" KITTENS

Some kittens just need foster homes until they are old enough to be spayed or neutered. They are already eating solid food. For these kittens, you just need to keep feeding them. It's best to start kitten-proofing before you get your new kitten. Start by getting down to a kitten's eye level. Get on the floor of your home. Notice any potential hazards that a kitten could get into. Raising kittens requires creativity. Just like a human child, kittens can make toys out of just about anything.

Have food available at all times, kittens will not overeat. Make sure the food is fresh; check / change it every four to six hours and before you go to bed and when you get up. If you give dry food, moisten it, because kittens can't chew dry food well until about 8 weeks. Start by offering a good quality canned kitten food, mixed into a thin paste with KMR or Gerbers or Beechnut baby food (chicken or turkey). Make sure that there are no onions or garlic in the ingredients!

Please use the kitty food provided by SpokAnimal to insure consistency. Changes in diet can cause intestinal upsets and diarrhea. Diarrhea can be life-threatening to a kitten if left untreated.

### STIMULATION FOR URINATION / DEFECATION

After each meal, the kitten must be stimulated to urinate and defecate. When kittens are with their mom she takes care of this by licking the kittens in order to stimulate their bowels. For motherless kittens, use a cotton ball, facial tissue or soft towel dampened with warm water to massage the kitten's anal and urinary areas. Do not rub; this will cause the area to become raw and sore. (The mother typically cleans this area herself before they're litter trained.)

This process is necessary after each meal until the kitten can eliminate on its own, usually around three weeks of age. Kittens should (and almost always will) urinate during each stimulation. They should defecate at least once a day. At this time you can start putting the kitten in a litter box to encourage it to go on its own. Drawer organizers purchased at office supply stores make great litterboxes for tiny kittens. Some kittens eat litter, so pelleted non-clumping litter should be used if possible.

### LITTER BOX TRAINING

**Litter boxes need to be changed / dumped every day.**

At about three weeks of age, a kitten should be able to eliminate without help, and you can start litter training. Leave a litter pan available to them at all times at this age. SpokAnimal will provide you with a litter pan.

If the kittens poop outside the litter pan, pick it up and put it in the pan for training, so they learn what it's there for.

After feeding, place kittens in a clean, shallow litter pan. Encourage them to scratch in the litter.

Expect accidents! This is also the stage in which lining their area with the shower curtain liner helps keep your home clean.

## SOCIALIZATION

Most mother cats will be attentive to their babies and social with humans, and will teach their kittens to be that way. However, SpokAnimal occasionally gets mother cats who are unsocial or semi-feral and in these cases, it is especially important for you as the foster parent to socialize the kittens. As soon as the kittens are at the age that they can start being handled and socialized, they should get regular human interaction. If the mother cat inhibits socialization or won't let you near her babies and they are fully weaned, the Foster Care Coordinator might suggest returning the mother cat to the shelter before the kittens are ready to come back. Kittens should generally stay with their mothers for as long as possible, so the decision to separate early will be made on a case-by-case basis.

## BASIC PLAY

Before 15 weeks, your kittens are sponges for information. The more you play with your kittens, the more socially adept they will be later in life. Frequent gentle handling and play with varied people, including men, women, and supervised children, makes them more social later in life. (However, be careful as children love kittens and sometimes hurt them by accident. Always supervise children with your foster kittens.)

Enrich your kittens' environment with toys. Bat-a-birds and laser pointers are two great interactive toys, especially with kids, since it keeps hands away from batting paws. They do love the silliest things as well, such as boxes, paper bags, bottle caps, toilet paper rolls and the little ring around the milk jug. Just make sure any toys are big enough that they do not fit into the kittens' mouth, but small and light enough for them to carry around. You can also get food foraging toys (20% of food through the toy), like the little balls with the holes in them that deposit treats. These give the kittens something to do and stimulates their brain. Do not allow them to play with plastic bags, string, wires, etc. as these can cause damage to your kittens.

## SHY KITTENS

Depending on their age and shyness level, give kittens an initial two-day adjustment period before you begin interacting with them too much. Move slowly and speak softly around the kittens. If you wear shoes indoors, consider slippers or socks around the kittens. Don't play loud music or musical instruments. Let the kittens be a part of the household action. Leave a TV or radio on after the kittens have been in your home for a

few days, so they become accustomed to human voices and sounds. If exposure to other pets is not an issue, set the whole crate in a busy living room with a TV playing.

Food is the key to taming. Make dry kitten food available at all times and give the kitten a small amount of wet food at least twice a day. The kitten may hesitate to eat in your presence at first, but be patient. Eventually the kitten will associate your presence with food. Chicken-flavored baby food is a special treat that almost no kitten can resist (make sure it doesn't contain onion or garlic!). Baby food should not replace kitten food as the primary diet, since it is not well balanced for kittens. Wrap the kitten in a towel, allowing its head to stick out. Offer baby food or wet food on a spoon. If the kitten does not respond, dab a tiny bit on the end of its nose. Once it tastes it, it will soon want more.

Once the kitten no longer runs away from you but instead comes toward you seeking to be fed, held and petted, you can confine it to a small, kitten-proofed room rather than a cage. Expose the kittens to a variety of people. Everyone should use soft voices at first, and approach the kittens in a non-threatening manner. If you do not notice signs of taming after a couple of days, kittens should be separated from each other to facilitate taming. Left together, one kitten can become outgoing and playful while another remains shy and withdrawn. If you cannot separate them, the kittens can be housed together, but be sure to spend time alone with each one. Siblings can be reunited when they have begun to show regular signs of socialization.

Don't try to rush the socialization process. Be patient, and monitor the progress of each individual kitten.

## ROUGH PLAY

If your kittens tend to grab your feet as you go up and down the stairs or hide under things and ambush your ankles or legs as you walk by, carry toys with you and toss them ahead of you to redirect their attention. Try to get them to focus on chasing the toys instead of attacking you. Consistently give a too rough kitten "time-outs" when it plays too roughly. The instant the kitten starts to bite or scratch you, end the game by leaving the room. Don't attempt to pick up your cat and put it in another room for the time-out as this could provoke more bites.

## DESTRUCTIVE SCRATCHING

Scratching is a normal cat behavior intended to sharpen the toenails for climbing and defense. The best tactic when dealing with inappropriate scratching is not to try to stop your cat from scratching, but instead to teach it where and what to scratch. An excellent approach is to provide the kitten with appropriate, cat-attractive surfaces and objects to scratch, such as scratching posts.

Provide a variety of scratching posts with different qualities and surfaces. Try posts made of cardboard, carpeting, wood, sisal and upholstery. Some cats prefer horizontal posts. Others like vertical posts or slanted posts. Some prefer a vertical grain for raking, while others favor a horizontal grain for picking. Once you figure out your cat's preference for scratching, provide additional posts of that kind in various locations. Keep in mind that all cats want a sturdy post that won't shift or collapse when used. Most cats also like a post that's tall enough that they can stretch fully. (This may be why cats seem to like drapes so much!) Encourage your cat to investigate its posts by scenting them with catnip, hanging toys on them and placing them in areas where it'll be inclined to climb on them.

Discourage inappropriate scratching by removing or covering other desirable objects. Turn speakers toward the wall. Put plastic, double-sided sticky tape, sandpaper or upside-down vinyl carpet runner (knobby parts up) on furniture or on the floor where your cat would stand to scratch your furniture. Place scratching posts next to these objects, as "legal" alternatives. If you catch your cat in the act of scratching an inappropriate object, you can try startling it by clapping your hands or squirting it with water. Use this procedure only as a last resort, because your cat may associate you with the startling event (clapping or squirting) and learn to scratch only when you are not around.

## FERAL KITTENS

House the kittens in a dog crate and place the crate in a quiet, kitten-safe room. Provide security for the kittens by covering the crate with a sheet or blanket. Kittens need a safe zone (such as a shoe box with blankets) inside the cage.

Do not try to handle the kittens.

Try not to stare at the kittens for prolonged periods. Look away frequently so you're less threatening to them. Do not allow young children to play with or handle feral kittens. They are not old enough to understand and react to their temperaments and behaviors.

## MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

When you have any medical care questions, contact a Foster Care Coordinator at (509) 534-8133 extension 205 or 215, who will either answer your questions or refer you to our in-house veterinarians. All non-emergent medical care should ONLY be provided by SpokAnimal clinic staff and SpokAnimal veterinarians.

The SpokAnimal shelter is open Monday – Friday from 11 am to 6 pm and Saturday – Sunday from 12 pm to 4 pm. The shelter’s phone number is (509) 534-8133.

SpokAnimal’s veterinary clinic is open Monday – Thursday from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. Friday from 10 am to 4:30 pm. The clinic’s phone number is (509) 534-4253.

On occasion, foster animals have medical emergencies that happen outside of the normal hours of operation. In the case of an after-hours medical emergency, please contact the Foster Care Coordinator at (509) XXX-XXXX. If the Coordinator is unavailable, call the back-up emergency contact at (509) XXX-XXXX. They will assist you in getting the animal the attention it needs.

**ALL OUTSIDE VETERINARY CARE MUST BE PRE-AUTHORIZED.**

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

## COMMON MEDICAL AILMENTS AND ILLNESSES

### EXTERNAL PARASITES

Fleas are insects that love to feed on kittens. The common flea is hardy; it can live up to four months without feeding, and has a life span of up to two years! Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas commonly attack in large numbers and an infestation can lead to anemia and even death. Fleas can also harbor tapeworms, so a large part of tapeworm treatment is flea control. For these reasons, it is essential that your home be free of fleas before bringing home a small kitten. If your foster kitten has fleas, it is important to remove them without harming the cat and wash all bedding in hot soapy water. One safe way to remove fleas from very young kittens is daily flea combing. Keep a jar of soapy water near you to dip the comb into after each stroke. If the kitten is less than four weeks old and infested, bathe with mild dish soap using warm water and immediately towel dry thoroughly afterwards. If the kitten is over four weeks old, the veterinarians at SpokAnimal will administer flea treatment. Do not administer your own flea treatment.

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. They cause intense itching, noted by scratching behind the ears and violent head shaking. Inside the ears you may see a crumbly, dark brown discharge that may smell bad (the discharge closely resembles coffee grounds). Typical signs of ear mites include headshaking, pawing and scratching at the ear, or brown flaky debris in the ear canals. If we have not already administered medication for this condition or if the kitten continues to have problems with its ears, contact the Foster Care Coordinator to schedule a clinic appointment.

### INTESTINAL PARASITES

The most common intestinal parasites in kittens are roundworms, hookworms, and tapeworms as well as giardia and coccidia and may often cause diarrhea, vomiting, or lethargy in kittens.

Roundworms: Kittens infected with roundworms typically lose their appetite, appear depressed, have diarrhea, become anemic and pass mucus or blood in their stool. Roundworms may be visible in the feces.

Hookworms: Very black and possibly bloody stool can be an indication of hookworms and should not be ignored.

Tapeworms: Tapeworms are not life threatening and are not contagious. You may notice white rice looking segments around the anus. Tapeworms are contracted by eating fleas that have ingested tapeworm eggs.



Giardia: Giardia is a parasite in the small intestine that interferes with the absorption of nutrients and fluids. This may lead to severe diarrhea.

Coccidia: Coccidia is also a parasite of the small intestine and indications of this parasite are mucus and blood in the stool. Kittens with coccidia often have yellow, runny stool.

If you notice diarrhea in your foster kitten(s), contact a Foster Care Coordinator to determine if a clinic appointment is needed. Make sure to provide a fresh stool sample at the time of the appointment when possible.

## RINGWORM

Ringworm is a contagious fungal skin disease, which is not caused by worms but rather a fungus invading the skin's outer layer, causing patches of hair loss. It is more commonly seen in cats that are under stress from overcrowding, lack of exercise, poor nutrition, or an unclean environment. Humans can catch ringworm. Ringworm is highly contagious. If you see areas of hair loss, contact a Foster Care Coordinator right away so we can provide prompt veterinary treatment. Treatments will vary according to the specific circumstances. It might be necessary to use oral medication, medicated baths, topical medication, or a combination of the three techniques.

## DEHYDRATION

Kittens can become dehydrated very quickly from not eating / drinking. When a kitten has diarrhea, it is a good idea to mix the kitten's bottle with Pedia-lyte in place of water. This will help prevent dehydration. If the diarrhea is severe (lasting over 24 hours) or contains blood, contact a Foster Care Coordinator to schedule a clinic appointment. Severe dehydration in kittens requires immediate intervention. The most effective way to test for dehydration is to pick up a fold of skin on the kitten's back and watching what happens when you release the skin - it should spring back into shape. If the skin remains in a ridge, the kitten is dehydrated. If you believe your foster kitten is dehydrated, contact a Foster Care Coordinator to schedule a clinic appointment. Keep track of what and when the kitten ate last.

## DIARRHEA

Diarrhea is common in kittens and be caused by parasites, viruses, bacteria, food changes, stress, overfeeding, or other causes. The most common cause of diarrhea in bottle baby kittens is diet. These kittens must abruptly adjust to formula after many have nursed on their mothers. It is vital that the type and recipe for the formula used is consistent, or further digestive problems will likely occur. Just like human babies, any

changes to the diet must be made very gradually (over several days) to avoid causing gastrointestinal upset.

Be sure to notify a Foster Coordinator if your kitten has any loose stools.

## VOMITING

If your kitten is vomiting, it is possible that it is eating its meals too quickly. You should watch the kitten when it eats and not allow it to eat too much too quickly. One episode of vomiting is generally not concerning, but if your foster animal vomits multiple times, notify a Foster Coordinator to schedule a clinic appointment.

## CONJUNCTIVITIS:

Conjunctivitis, inflammation of the eyelid membranes, is a common ailment in cats, and is caused by many different factors: irritants such as cigarette smoke, injury, viruses, bacteria, and plant pollens. Symptoms can include cloudy or discolored discharge from the eye, blinking, and reddened, exposed, or swollen third eyelids (also called haws or nictating membranes). Don't hesitate, notify a Foster Coordinator to schedule a clinic appointment, so ointments can be prescribed to help the eye heal.

## URINARY TRACT INFECTION (UTI)

Signs of UTI in cats will vary. Many cats will whine or yelp when using the litter box and you may find blood in their urine. They may also have 'accidents' even if they use the litter box without trouble otherwise. You may notice your cat makes frequent trips to the box but they seem to have trouble getting any urine to pass. If you see any symptoms, contact a Foster Care Coordinator as soon as possible.

## UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION (URI)

Feline Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is similar to a cold in humans. It is especially common in cats that have been exposed to a lot of other cats. URI is rarely fatal in adult cats, and usually resolves within a few weeks. Treatment generally consists of supportive care, as the underlying cause is often a viral infection and there is no completely effective treatment besides time and allowing the cat's own immune system to do its job.

URI is highly contagious to other cats but is not contagious to people or other species. Most cats are vaccinated against it. However, the vaccine is not 100% protective, so it's a good idea to isolate cats that are showing signs of the disease, and wash your hands after handling sick cats.

What are the signs of URI?

- Clear or colored nasal discharge
- Sneezing/congestion
- Red/inflamed conjunctiva (inner lining of the eyelids), eye discharge – clear or colored
- Ulcers/sores on the nose, lips, tongue or gums
- Fever/lethargy/loss of appetite (these may be signs of many other diseases as well)

Provide the cat with a quiet, warm place to rest. Make sure the cat is eating. When cats get stuffy noses, they can't smell their food very well and may not want to eat. Offer smelly, wet food. Warming it up often helps. Gently clean the cat's nose and eyes with a soft cloth moistened with warm water. If the cat is very congested, use a humidifier or put the cat in the bathroom and run hot water in the shower for a few minutes a couple of times a day. Moderate to severe congestion is often a sign of a secondary bacterial infection, so contact a Foster Care Coordinator to discuss treatment.

## FADING KITTENS

Fading Kitten Syndrome is a life threatening emergency in which a kitten “crashes” and begins to fade away. It is also referred to as “failure to thrive”. The first four weeks of life can be the most perilous time for young kittens. The kitten will stop growing, begin to lose weight, and stop nursing and crawling. They may cry continuously and lose the ability to stay upright. The mother cat may push them out of the nest, where they often chill and starve to death. Kittens fade very quickly—they will not last 48 hours without veterinary care, and probably will not recover even with intensive care. There is no clear cause or reason for this condition - it has been linked to birth defects, environmental stress, and infectious disease. Early veterinary treatment is imperative, but even with tube feeding, rehydration, and monitoring, most fading kittens will die.

## LOSING A KITTEN OR KITTENS

The death of kitten is an upsetting experience. No matter how it died, your kitten has become part of the family. You've bonded with them. You've spent time and effort training your kitten. Unfortunately, kittens are fragile and can have a high mortality rate.

If you have young children, they may be particularly upset about the loss of a kitten. They may have just begun to learn about raising kittens. And this experience may be their first exposure to death and loss. Your other pets may have bonded with your kitten, as well. Like humans, they may become depressed about the loss and display signs or grief, such as poor appetite and lack of interest in playing.

If you experience difficulty coping with the loss of your kitten, there is help available. SpokAnimal staff, volunteers, and other fosters have gone through this loss as well, and are here to help you through it. Don't hesitate to reach out for help!

Do NOT blame yourself – the mortality rate is quite high with young kittens, in particular those without a mom. Remember... Make raising kittens a fun experience! Any kitten you've ever fostered was given a second chance at life because of you.

## SUPPLIES

- Carrier or box: SpokAnimal always supplies foster families with carriers that must be returned with the kittens when they return for adoption.
- Small litter box for kittens: SpokAnimal will supply you with a small litter box for kittens. Cut-down cardboard boxes or pie tins work well, just be sure that it is low enough for a small kitten to step into! Rolled-up towels on sides of the litter box can act like a ramp.
- Cat litter: Any non-clumping variety of litter will work. Kittens are curious by nature and will try to eat the litter at first. If the litter is clumping, it may cement in the kittens' intestines and be fatal.
- Water bowls: Should be heavy and difficult to tip over.
- Food bowls (at least 2): One is for the eat-at-will dry cat food, the other for canned food. You can use pie tins, paper plates, or any relatively flat plate or saucer. Bigger litters will need multiple bowls.
- Food: SpokAnimal will provide you with dry and canned kitten food. If desired, you can obtain all-meat baby food (must not contain vegetables or onion/garlic powder). Have food and water available at all times.
- Heat: Unless the nursery is at least 85° F and your kittens are two weeks or older, you need to supply extra heat. Be sure that the kittens have room to move away from the heat!
  - Heating pad: Place it under several towels, and make sure that it covers only half of the floor area of their box. The heating pad should be on "low" or "medium" to prevent overheating the kittens. Make sure to cover any electrical cords as well, so that the kittens are not tempted to play and bite on them.
  - Hot water bottles or rice bags: Heat in a microwave until warm to the touch without being uncomfortable. These should also be covered by towels, and should be changed regularly to ensure that they stay warm for the kittens to snuggle up against.
  - Infrared lamp: Securely attach overhead a sufficient distance from the kitten box to maintain a temperature of approximately 85 degrees F in one section of the nursery. Ensure that any electrical cords that are within

reach of the kittens are properly covered so the kittens are not tempted to play and bite on them.

- Clean towels and blankets: You will want to change bedding daily, so having plenty of extra towels on hand is a lifesaver! Hand towels can make bottle feeding much more comfortable for the kittens and less messy for yourself.
- Toys: Plastic, disinfectable toys are good to reuse for new litters. Kittens can also amuse themselves with empty toilet paper rolls that you dispose of after each litter. Be sure to "kitten-proof" your home because kittens will play with anything and everything. Their climbing abilities will develop as they grow, so anything of value should be kept out of reach!
- Scale: A food or postal scale will be very helpful in monitoring small kittens' growth to ensure that they are consuming enough and to catch early signs of any potential issues. You can also predict when they will be two pounds and ready for surgery if you know approximately how much they gain each day or week.

## HOUSEHOLD HAZARDS

Finding household hazards takes some creative thinking. Imagine what items around your home a kitten could find attractive enough to turn into a play toy.

Here's a list of potential kitten hazards.

- Falls - Yes, kittens love to look out the window and check out the scenery. But, they don't necessarily have nine lives. Make sure open windows have screens to prevent kittens from falling.
- Electrical Cords - Cords look like inviting toys for kittens. Kittens love to chew and bite through cords. However, they may be in for a jolt. Put feline-repellant bitter sprays near cords to deter kittens from chewing.
- Small coins - Kitten can choke on small coins that have been dropped. Pick up small items off of the floor.
- "The Kitchen" - Kittens are curious and affectionate creatures. They love to "help" you while you cook or put away food. Just be careful to make sure that your kitten hasn't accidentally gotten locked in the refrigerator, washer or dryer. (Yes, it happens!) Also, make sure your kitty does not jump on a hot stove and burn its paws.
- Toxic Plants - We all love to have a well-decorated verdant home. However, some plants are downright dangerous to felines. Check plants around your home to see if they are kitten-safe. Some of the most toxic plants are in the lily family.
- Toxic Foods - There are also several foods that can be toxic to your kitties, such as onions and garlic. Check online for a complete list of items to avoid!
- Drowning - Although most kittens do not love baths, many are fascinated by running water. Watch your kitten around bath tubs, fountains, or any areas of

running water. Keep your toilet lids down if you are keeping your kittens in a bathroom.

## THANK YOU FOSTER VOLUNTEERS!!

As foster volunteers, you will give the animals you care for and love a very special gift- a second chance at a full and wonderful life.

The staff and volunteers at SpokAnimal greatly appreciate your time, energy and dedication.

Please let us know if there's anything we can do to make fostering easier and even more rewarding.