



Foster Program Manual for Kittens



Mt. Pleasant
Animal Shelter

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About Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter

For almost 50 years, Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter has been providing exceptional care for homeless animals, working tirelessly to find a permanent, loving home for every cat and dog we serve. Mt. Pleasant animal shelter is a registered 501(c)(3) organization that is solely funded by contributions, grants and bequests.

Our priority is to save abandoned animals within our community; however, our efforts don't end there. We also partner with shelters around the country to save at-risk animals from being euthanized. Adoptable animals reside with us, or with one of our fosters, until they find their forever home. We become their loving family until they find their new home.

Our Vision

We envision a community of people and organizations committed to working together to eliminate the occurrence of abused, neglected and homeless animals.

Our Mission

To build a community of people and organizations working together to save today's, and prevent tomorrow's, abused, neglected and homeless animals.

How we do this

- Deliver the highest level of animal care to prepare today's animals in need for their future homes
- Bring together the cats and dogs who need a loving family with the people who want them
- Provide community services and resources to ensure every animal has a safe and healthy life

Our Values

Animal Focused: Our highest priority is to provide the best care for our animals. We serve as the voice of our animals and bring the experience, knowledge and passion for animal welfare to ensure our animals find a loving home.

Compassion: We treat our animals, our animal welfare community and our staff with respect and dignity.

Community Based: We offer continued support to the adoptive families and their animals to ensure a safe, healthy and happy life together. We value our animal welfare community since we cannot achieve our mission without them.

Personal Accountability: Each person takes responsibility for their role and following through on commitments.

Integrity: All employees, directors and community members adhere to Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter's values and principles. We strive to be timely, open and honest in our communications.



Introduction

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering kittens for Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter. By opening up your home to foster pets, you're not only helping to save lives, but you're also providing the individual attention and care these kittens desperately need.

Kittens are some of the most at-risk pets in shelters because they require intensive around-the-clock care, and many shelters do not have the resources or staff to provide that level of care. Once you have completed your foster application online, our foster and/or outreach coordinator will get in touch with you to sign you up for one of our scheduled orientation and training sessions. In the session, we'll go over this manual and answer any questions you have about the program.

Foster homes are asked to provide care for the kittens and provide transportation to and from veterinary appointments as needed. Once the kittens are old enough and weigh enough to be spayed or neutered (typically two pounds), you will bring them to Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter to be fixed and then look for homes. Care for foster kittens includes a strict feeding schedule, cleaning, and lots of snuggling and play time.

Although fostering kittens is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. By participating in this program, you are saving lives and helping kittens find families. Through fostering, we can work together to save more lives.

Frequently Asked Questions

What do foster families need to provide?

Foster families need to provide:

- A healthy and safe environment for their foster kittens
- Transportation to and from the shelter and all veterinary appointments as needed
- Socialization and cuddle time to help teach cats positive family and pet relationships
- Lots of exercise and positive stimulation to help them develop into great cats

How much time do I need to spend with a foster kitten?

As much time as you can. The more time you spend with your foster kittens, the more socialized they will be to people. The amount of time required for feeding will vary depending on the age of the kittens you are fostering. Very young kittens need to be bottle-fed every two to three hours, while older ones may be eating on their own and needing to be fed just a couple times a day.

Can I foster kittens even if I have a full-time job?

Yes. The foster coordinator will match you with kittens appropriate for your schedule. We will need you to be available, however, to take the kittens to a vet appointment if they are sick.



Frequently Asked Questions Continued

How many kittens will I be fostering?

We like to have at least two kittens in a foster home so they can socialize with and learn from each other. Sometimes there are special circumstances in which a kitten goes to a foster home alone, but it's usually for a medical or behavioral reason. The decision is made by the foster coordinator and the veterinary team.

How long will the kittens need to be in foster care?

Once a kitten weighs two pounds, he/she can be spayed or neutered and then put up for adoption. If you are fostering a litter of kittens, we will try to keep at least two of the kittens together for the surgery, but we want to get everyone spayed or neutered and ready for adoption as early as possible.

What is my role before and after the spay/neuter surgery?

The foster coordinator will advise you of the spay/neuter surgery date. You will drop your kittens off at Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter the night before the surgery.

After the kittens' surgeries, you can choose to pick them up so they can recover in your home for a few days, or they can stay at the shelter. You will be given a foster animal biography form to fill out so you can tell potential adopters about any special or fun personality traits that the kittens have or anything else that you think adopters would want to know about the kittens. As you would expect, kittens are usually adopted quickly.

Will I need to give medicine to the foster kittens?

While we do our best to ensure that we are sending out healthy kittens to foster care, most illnesses have incubation periods, meaning that if the kittens picked up something at the shelter, symptoms could arise after you take them home. So, some kittens do not require any medicine, while others do. If your foster kittens need medication, we can show you how to administer it before you take the animal's home. Only the shelter veterinarian will prescribe medicine for our shelter pets. Please do not medicate our pets without consulting with the shelter veterinarian first.

Can I let my foster kittens play with my personal pets?

No. This also includes common areas of the home that other household pets may have access to. Kittens are very susceptible to illness and can carry or catch dangerous ailments easily. They are also too young to test for some illnesses or be vaccinated. For this reason, ***we require that foster parents isolate foster kittens with their own litter mates for the entire duration of their time in foster from other household pets.***

We also advise that you consult with your veterinarian before fostering to ensure that all of your personal pets are healthy and up to date on all vaccines. If, for any reason, your personal pet becomes ill while you are fostering, we cannot provide medical care for your personal pet and will not reimburse any damages.

Never leave your personal pets unsupervised around the foster kittens.



Will any of my foster kittens die?

Sadly, kittens are fragile, so it is always possible for them to become ill and pass away while in a foster home. This may be the hardest thing about fostering kittens. If it is something you don't want to encounter, then fostering kittens may not be the best fit for you. But please keep in mind that without foster homes, most of these kittens would not stand a chance of survival in a shelter. You are helping to save lives.

Who will take care of my foster kittens if I need to go out of town?

If you have travel plans while you are fostering kittens, you will need to contact the foster coordinator and make arrangements to return your foster group to the shelter. Please provide at least one week's notice to ensure that we have space for your kittens. If your trip is over a holiday, please provide a minimum of two weeks' notice.

You cannot leave your foster kittens with an unauthorized person or pet sitter. We have specific training for foster parents, and pet sitters have not undergone that training or signed the release waivers for the foster program.

What if a foster kitten bites me?

If any of your foster pets bite you and break skin, causing you to bleed, you need to report the bite to the foster coordinator within 24 hours of when the bite occurred. The law requires that we report all bites. The teeth of the animal, not the nails, must have broken the skin. If you are unsure, then please report the bite anyway.

What if I want to adopt one of my foster kittens?

If you want to adopt a foster kitten, you will need to complete an adoption application and follow the full adoption process. Once cleared for adoption, you will be able to complete the adoption.

What if I know someone who's interested in adopting one of my foster kittens?

If someone you know is interested in adopting one of your foster kittens, please contact the foster coordinator as soon as possible, because once the kittens are up for adoption, we cannot hold them for anyone. However, we do want to accommodate referrals from foster parents if we can.

Will it be difficult for me to say goodbye to my foster kittens?

Saying goodbye can be the most difficult part of fostering but remember that we always have more kittens who need wonderful foster homes. Keep in mind that by fostering these vulnerable pets, you are playing a crucial role in helping to save lives.

Preparing for Your Foster Kittens

Your foster kittens should be separated from all other animals in your household and kept in a small area, such as a spare room or bathroom, where they have access to their food, water and litter box. And because kittens cannot regulate their body temperature, this area should also be in a warm, draft-free area. It may be a good idea to consider an area that is easy to clean up in terms of spills and litter box accidents, which will happen since the kittens are learning. Please don't put the kittens in a garage or place that has outdoor access; those locations are not safe.



Supplies You Will Need

Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter will provide you with any supplies that you may need. However, we greatly appreciate any help that you can provide in supplying items for your foster kittens. Here's what you'll need to care for your foster kittens:

- At least one bowl for dry food and one for water: If you have a large litter, you will need to provide more than one bowl each for water and food.
- A supply of kitten food: At the kitten nursery, kittens will be fed Royal Canin kitten dry food and wet food, so they will need to be fed that brand of food (or better) in the foster home.
- New bottle for each bottle-fed litter and formula for bottle-feeding: KMR is the required brand of formula for bottle-feeding kittens.
- Litter box with low sides: More than one may be needed for larger litters.
- Non-clumping litter: Use pine pellets or clay litter.
- Heat source: Kittens can't keep themselves warm, so you have to provide a heat source. The SnuggleSafe microwave heating pad is recommended.
- A soft place to sleep: Old towels or blankets work well.
- A secure sleeping area: A cat carrier with the door removed or a box laid on its side work well.
- Toys: Use kitten-safe toys that are easy to sanitize and clean. Kittens can play with them when you're not home.
- Scratching post: Kittens need to learn to scratch on them rather than the furniture.

Kitten-Proofing Your Home

Foster kittens are tiny and cute, but just like children, they are also very curious. They will try to get into everything to explore, so you will need to kitten-proof your home. Here are some tips:

- Put away any small items that a kitten can swallow.
- Hide any breakable items, block electrical outlets and remove toxic plants.
- If your kittens are staying in a bathroom, make sure that the toilet lid is closed at all times.
- Block off any spaces that the kittens could crawl into and hide in.
- When setting up your kitten room, be sure to place the litter boxes as far away from food and water as possible.



Scheduling Appointments for Your Foster Kittens

During the time that you foster kittens, you'll need to make a number of appointments — to pick up and drop off your kittens, take them in for vaccines and spay/neuter, and pick-up supplies. When you pick up your foster kitten(s), you will receive information that specifies the date for your next appointment.

You are responsible for attending appointments for your pet's vaccines and/or treatments on the date indicated. All appointments will be scheduled by Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter.

Picking up and returning your foster kittens

To pick up and return kittens, simply schedule an appointment with the foster coordinator. When you speak with the foster coordinator about picking up some kittens, he or she will assess what age of kittens will work best with your lifestyle. Appointments will typically be scheduled Monday through Sunday between 9 am and 3 pm.

Scheduling vaccines for your kittens

When you pick up your foster kittens, you will receive paperwork, which will contain the dates that your foster kittens' vaccines are due and any pertinent medical or behavioral information that you need for that group of kittens. Keep in mind that all appointments will be scheduled during normal business hours.

Scheduling vet appointments for your kittens

For non-emergency situations, please understand that our veterinary team's schedule fills up quickly and may not be available for same-day appointments. We ask that you schedule basic non-emergency appointments in advance. You can call the foster coordinator to request a vet appointment. When you call to set up an appointment, the foster coordinator will discuss availability and then contact the veterinary team to schedule the appointment.

Once the appointment is scheduled, the foster coordinator will call you with the appointment day and time.

Picking up supplies

If you require supplies for your kittens, please contact the foster coordinator who can make arrangements to provide you with what you need.

Scheduling your kittens for spay/neuter

When your foster kittens weigh at least two pounds, they can be spayed or neutered. The foster coordinator will provide you with a date and time when you will need to bring your kitten(s) to the shelter. They will be brought in the day before their scheduled surgery.



Caring for Your Foster Kittens

Because kittens are fragile, it is important for you to watch the behavior of your foster kittens closely and monitor their health daily. To keep track of their health, keep a journal of the kittens' weight, eating habits and overall health. You should weigh the kittens daily to ensure that they are growing and record the weight in the journal.

Watch for signs of illness, including frequent crying, restlessness, weakness, coldness (hypothermia), diarrhea, dehydration, shallow or labored breathing, paleness, or blueness in color. Notify the foster department immediately if a kitten is losing weight, is cold to the touch, or is having trouble breathing (either shallow or heavy breathing).

Kittens are susceptible to illness, so foster kittens must be kept indoors. If your personal cat has access to the outdoors, he or she cannot interact with your foster kittens. Also, please do not let your foster kittens ride loose in a car. Use a carrier at all times to transport kittens to and from appointments.

Caring for bottle-fed kittens

Bottle-feeding neonatal kittens requires an around-the-clock commitment. Thank you so much for offering your time and attention to these fragile babies. And please remember that we are here to support you. Here is some general info about bottle-feeding.

Milk preparation. You can pre-mix enough formula to last for 24 hours of feeding, but it must be refrigerated at all times. Discard all unused and mixed formula after 24 hours. Only heat enough formula for each feeding, and throw away any uneaten warmed formula after each feeding. Do not re-use warmed formula because harmful bacteria can develop in it.

Bottle-feeding tips. It is easier to feed your kittens when they are gently wrapped in a towel or blanket, instead of just using your hands. The towel or blanket is softer and warmer than your hands, and being wrapped up makes the kittens feel safer as they eat. If the kitten allows it, the forelegs should be free to allow him to "knead" with his feet. This kneading activity is essential to the kitten's muscle development and helps aid in digestion of the kitten's food. Also, be careful to position the kitten so that his belly is toward the floor. To decrease the chance of formula being aspirated into the lungs, kittens should not be fed on their backs.

Latching on. It may take a couple tries for a kitten to latch on to the bottle nipple. Just be patient; sometimes kittens need some encouragement to eat. Make sure that the nipple you are using on the bottle has an adequate flow of milk. When the nipple tip is punctured with a sterile needle, formula should drip out (one drop at a time, not a stream) when the bottle is inverted 180 degrees. Do not hesitate to call the foster department if you need any help or assistance with feeding your kittens. We are always here for you, ready to answer any questions that you may have.

Aspiration. If liquid bubbles out through the kitten's nose or he starts coughing, he may have gotten formula in his lungs. Pat the kitten very gently on the back to elicit a cough or sneeze, or hold him in an inverted position, tail-over-head, for a moment to remove the formula from his lungs. Please notify the foster department if this happens so we can determine if antibiotics or a vet visit is needed.

Peeing and pooping. Bottle-fed kittens need help with elimination, so you'll need to stimulate your kittens to pee and poop. After you feed them, wipe each kitten's back end with a baby wipe or warm wet cotton ball. Remember to do this every time you feed them. Document the color and consistency in your journal. Kittens should urinate after every meal and should poop at least once a day. The normal color of kitten poop is various shades of mustard and the consistency is similar as well. When a kitten is first introduced to formula, it is normal for him or her not to poop for 48 hours.





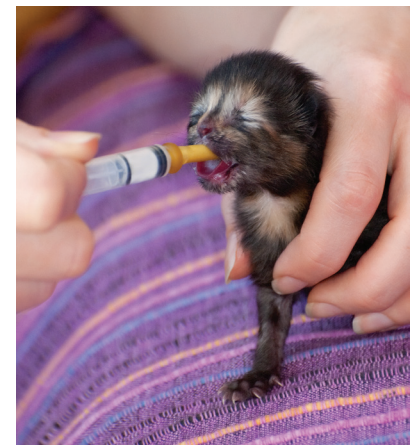
Keeping kittens warm. When kittens are infants (less than two weeks old), they can be kept in small carriers or playpens that can easily be covered by a blanket to maintain heat and reduce draftiness. As they grow and become more mobile, they will need more space to roam and play. Also, do not forget that kittens cannot regulate their body temperatures, so please keep a SnuggleSafe disc warm and with them at all times. Because kittens' skin is very sensitive and prone to thermal burns, the warming disc must be covered by a blanket and puppy pad that the kittens cannot burrow under.

Weighing. Please weigh the kittens before and after each feeding to ensure that they are growing and record the weights in the journal. .

How to bottle-feed kittens

Kittens will bottle-feed every two to four hours, depending on their age. Steps for bottle-feeding a kitten:

1. Warm the formula: Place the bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Before feeding the kittens, always test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on your inner wrist to be sure it is not too hot. It should be slightly warmer than your body temperature.
2. Ensure that your foster kitten is warm before offering food. Do not attempt to feed a kitten who is chilled* because it can have serious health consequences.
3. Wrap the kitten in a towel or blanket and position him so that his belly is toward the floor. Kittens should not be fed on their backs or in an upright position.
4. Turn the bottle upside down and allow a drop of formula to come out. Place the bottle nipple in the kitten's mouth and gently move it back and forth, holding the bottle at a 45-degree angle to keep air from getting into the kitten's stomach. This movement should encourage the kitten to start eating. If at first you do not succeed, wait a few minutes and try again. Usually, the kitten will latch on and begin to suckle. If the bottle appears to be collapsing, gently remove the nipple from the kitten's mouth and let more air return to the bottle.
5. Weigh each kitten before and after feeding and record the weights in your journal.



* A kitten's ideal body temperature is 100 to 102 degrees. If a kitten feels cold to the touch, contact the foster coordinator immediately. A kitten who is cold and unresponsive should be warmed right away. Place the kitten on an approved heating pad safely wrapped in two or three layers of towels. Turn the kitten side to side every 5 minutes. To stimulate blood flow, you may, ever so gently, massage the kitten with hand-rubbing.

Weaning kittens

Once your kittens are about four weeks old, it is time to start the weaning process. Your goal is to have the kittens eating on their own consistently by the time they are adopted. So, beginning at four weeks, start offering warm gruel (two parts wet food, one-part formula) at all times, along with dry kitten food and water. Every four to six hours, discard any uneaten gruel and provide a fresh batch.

You will still be supplementing the kittens with a bottle every eight hours to ensure that they are getting all the nutrients they need but encourage them to eat gruel before you offer a bottle. To get a kitten interested in trying the gruel, you may have to offer the gruel with a spoon or use your finger to place a small amount on the kitten's tongue. Ideally, by the end of five weeks, your foster kittens will be happily eating dry and wet food on their own.

It is important to continue weighing your foster kittens every day, after each feeding, to ensure that they are always gaining weight. During the weaning stage, you should also begin introducing the kittens to the litter box because they should be able to eliminate on their own by about four weeks of age.

Making formula

Mix two parts water with one part formula. Mix the powder and water until all clumps are gone. Remember, mixed formula only lasts for 24 hours.

Making gruel

Mix 1/2 can of wet food with 1/4 can of formula per kitten. You can add a little water if the kittens seem to like a looser consistency. It's OK make gruel in bulk and refrigerate it, but you'll need to warm it before offering it to the kittens.

Caring for independent eaters

By six to seven weeks old, your kittens should be independent eaters. Dry food should be their primary source of food but offer wet food frequently as well to encourage eating and maximize growth. Replace the water in their water dish twice a day and wipe out the dish if needed.

During this stage, your daily responsibilities include socializing the kittens and exposing them to new situations and environments. It's important to try and keep all experiences positive for the kittens, so give them lots of treats and toys as they learn about new sounds, smells, places and faces.



As always, watch the behavior of your kittens and monitor their health daily. Continue to keep a journal detailing each foster kitten's weight, appetite, energy level and overall health. Weigh the kittens once a day, preferably around the same time, to minimize the variables when tracking the kittens' growth. Look over each kitten every day for physical changes or potential medical problems.

Now that the kittens are using a litter box, be sure to scoop the box at least two times daily. Every other day, dump the litter, clean the box with a mild detergent (such as dishwashing liquid) and put in fresh litter. You will want to monitor the kittens for diarrhea and clean the litter box more frequently if diarrhea is apparent.

At this stage, play with the kittens several times a day with interactive toys. Play time provides stimulation, encourages socialization and releases excess energy. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, feather toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster kittens like. Cat toys don't have to be fancy or expensive. Cats often enjoy playing with something as simple as a paper bag (remove the handles for safety) or a box with holes cut in the sides.

Don't leave your foster kittens alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm to them. Examples are string toys, yarn and Da Bird (feathers dangling from a string and wand). Toys such as ping-pong balls and toilet paper tubes are safe. Also, it may seem cute, but discourage your foster kittens from play-biting your hands and feet. This is something that adopters may not find desirable.

Cleaning up between litters

Once you have returned your group of kittens for adoption, you must sanitize your fostering room or area before you can take home a new batch of kittens. Remove anything the kittens touched and clean it with a weak bleach solution, consisting of one part bleach to 32 parts cold water.

If you have items that can be washed in the dishwasher, please do so since the heat will disinfect those items. Plastic or metal items that need to be sterilized, such as litter boxes or plastic toys, should be soaked in the bleach solution for 10 minutes and then rinsed off. Wash all bedding with bleach and hot water and throw away any toys that cannot be sterilized. Being conscientious about sterilization will help ensure that your next foster group will not catch any illnesses from the previous group of kittens.

Quick feeding guide

We will provide you with very detailed training regarding feeding before you take your foster kittens home. But here's a brief summary of the feeding protocol for kittens up to eight weeks old:

Week 1: Bottle-feeding

Food type: Milk replacement formula
Frequency: Every 2–3 hours (8–12 times per day)
Amount: 3–4 cc per feeding, approximately 3–6 g per kitten

Week 2: Bottle-feeding

Food type: Milk replacement formula
Frequency: Every 3 hours (8 times per day)
Amount: 5–6 cc per feeding, approximately 8–15 g per kitten

Week 3: Bottle-feeding

Food type: Milk replacement formula
Frequency: Every 4 hours (6 times per day)
Amount: 13–17 cc per feeding, approximately 10–20 g per kitten

Week 4: Weaning stage

Food type: Milk replacement formula, gruel, kitten kibble and water
Frequency: Kibble, water and gruel should be available to kittens at all times; bottle-feed every 8 hours (3 times per day)
Amount: 13–17 cc per feeding with the bottle; will vary depending on how much gruel the kitten eats

Weeks 5–8: Solid food

Food type: Dry kitten food, wet kitten food and water
Frequency: Available at all times
You will need to offer fresh wet food 2 to 3 times daily

Fostering Moms and Kittens

Mother cats, also known as “queens,” need to be in a calm environment so that they can be stress-free and feel like they are keeping their kittens safe. Sometimes, stress can cause a mother cat to become aggressive or to not care for her babies properly. With that in mind, choose a private and quiet room of your home, away from the daily activities of your family, in which to situate the mother cat and her kittens.

It's also important that they be kept away from other pets in the home. Other pets can be perceived as a threat by the mother cat and cause her to act aggressively to protect her young. If you have children and an active home, it may be best to foster when the kittens are four weeks or older. Sometimes mother cats will behave less defensively if their kittens are older.

Bringing everyone home

Set up your fostering room before you bring the mother cat and her kitten's home. You should put the litter box as far away from the mother cat's food and water bowls as possible and provide a couple of different safe places where she can care for her kittens. A dark area equipped with a whelping box is ideal.

A whelping box is a box that is large enough for the mother cat to lie on her side slightly away from her kittens with all of the kittens in the box with her. The box should have sides high enough to prevent the kittens from wandering away, but low enough so it's easy for the mother cat to come and go as she needs to. Lining the bottom of the box with puppy pads topped with newspapers will help absorb moisture. You can place an easy-to-clean blanket on top of the absorbent materials to give the mother cat and kittens a soft place to lie on. Please keep all these materials dry so that the kittens are not chilled by dampness. Do not place straw, hay or shavings in the area where the mother and kittens are kept.

When you bring your foster kittens and their mom home, put them all in the fostering room and close the door, allowing the mom to explore on her own. Give her a couple of hours before you enter her room and don't be alarmed if it takes a few days for her to stop hiding.

Mom's care of her kittens

The momma cat should take care of her kittens by herself for at least three to four weeks before she starts the weaning process for her babies. Each momma cat that you foster will be slightly different in her level of attentiveness, but there are three basic stages of nursing (see below). If for any reason your momma cat is not performing one of the listed functions, please notify the foster coordinator right away to evaluate whether the mom has a medical concern that we need to address.



Kittens are born blind, but they can feel their mother's heat and seek her out to begin nursing within two hours of being born. Mother cats should be lying on their sides to ensure that their kittens can find the nipples for nursing. Here are three stages of nursing:

One to two weeks old: The mother cat initiates nursing by licking her kittens to wake them up and curling her body around them. After she wakes all of her babies, the kittens search for a short time period and then quickly latch on.

Two to three weeks old: The kittens' eyes and ears begin to function, and they start to explore beyond the nesting area. This is when the kittens start interacting and playing with their mother. At this age, the kittens start to initiate some of the nursing and momma should comply by lying in the nursing position.

Four to five weeks old: The kittens begin weaning and, in turn, the mother cat no longer initiates any nursing. If the mother cat still allows the kittens to nurse, it will be initiated by the kittens and can be lateral or upright nursing.

Occasionally, mom cats develop mastitis when their kittens stop nursing and begin to eat on their own. Mastitis occurs when the mammary glands inflame and harden, creating a very painful infection for the mother cat and causing symptoms such as a fever and listlessness. If you think your mother cat may have mastitis, call the foster coordinator on the next business day. This is not an emergency condition.

The mother cat will groom and lick her babies frequently for the first two to four weeks. She will stimulate her kittens to pee and poop and will generally consume the fecal matter and urine. As the babies become more mobile, they will start to leave the nest and deposit urine and feces nearby, which is a good time to start introducing a couple of low-sided litter boxes (disposable tend to work best).

To ensure that the mother cat has enough to eat, always give her access to both wet and dry food. Food intake for a nursing mother can be two to four times the amount eaten by a cat who is not nursing. When fostering a momma cat, it is very important to observe her behavior daily and watch her interactions with her kittens to spot any problems. Unfortunately, 8 percent of kittens pass away because of inadequate maternal care. This can happen for many different reasons, some of which are beyond our control.

Problem behaviors in momma cats

Here are some details about problem behaviors in momma cats and what you can do about them.

Maternal neglect. Sometimes a mother cat stops providing care to one or all of her kittens. The neglect may be because of a birth defect or weakness in the kitten; she may just be trying to follow nature's course, focusing her attention on the stronger kittens. Neglect may also happen because she is inexperienced or she's in a stressful environment. Either way, that's why it's so important to make daily observations to ensure that she is caring for her babies. If she will let you handle the kittens, you should weigh each kitten once a day to ensure that they are gaining weight. If you notice that she is spending all of her time away from the kittens, is not grooming or nursing them frequently, or doesn't respond to their cries, please call the foster coordinator right away.

Maternal aggression toward other animals. Aggressive behavior directed at other animals is common and expected from mother cats because they have a maternal instinct to protect their young at all times. With that in mind, please do not try to introduce her to the other animals in your home. As mentioned above, the mom cat and her kittens should have a quiet room of their own away from all other pets so that she and her babies can always feel safe. If she has seen another animal and becomes stressed or aggressive, it is very important to leave her alone and not try to comfort her. Give her 20 minutes or so to calm down and then check on her.

Maternal aggression toward people. Sometimes mother cats will act aggressively toward people. These behaviors may include hissing, growling, swatting and biting. Again, the mother is merely trying to protect her young. We evaluate mom cats for these behaviors before sending them into foster homes, but sometimes the behaviors develop later. If you have a mother exhibiting these behaviors, do not try to "correct" the behavior with a spray bottle or any type of punishment. She is only acting out of instinct to protect her babies and you could cause her aggressive behavior to escalate.

Contact the foster coordinator at the first sign of any of the above behaviors so we can assess the situation and decide on the safest option for momma and her babies.

Separating kittens and moms

If all of your foster animals, mom included, are healthy and friendly, we have no reason to separate mom from kittens before they are eight weeks old. But there are a few medical or behavioral reasons for separating them earlier than eight weeks:

- As mentioned above, if the mother cat is showing signs of maternal neglect and is no longer caring for her kittens, the foster coordinator may decide to separate her from her kittens.
- If the mother cat is semi-feral or very undersocialized, we may decide to separate the kittens once they are eating on their own consistently and no longer need to nurse (around four to five weeks old). Separating them would prevent the kittens from learning feral behaviors from their mother and help them to become socialized, which increases their chances of finding forever homes.
- If there is a medical concern about the mom or babies, a veterinarian could make the decision to separate the kittens from the mother cat.

The kittens' best chance at survival is to stay with their mom. Please do not separate your foster kittens from their mom for any reason, or attempt to supplement the mother's milk with formula, without consulting the foster coordinator.



Medical and Emergency Protocols

When you pick up your foster kittens, you will receive a Foster Goal Sheet that specifies the dates that vaccines are due and any medications that your kittens are taking. You are responsible for scheduling appointments for your kittens' vaccines on or around the due dates indicated on your Foster Goal Sheet. Vaccines and dewormers are given starting at four weeks old and every two weeks afterward until they are adopted. To schedule appointments for vaccines, call or email the foster coordinator.

If you are fostering a group of kittens on medications, please ensure that your kittens get all prescribed doses. Do not end medication early for any reason. If any of your foster kittens have not responded to medications after five days (or in the time instructed by a veterinarian), please contact the foster coordinator.

Veterinary care

We provide all medical care for our foster animals. Because we are ultimately responsible for your foster animals' well-being, our staff must authorize any and all treatment for foster animals with our shelter veterinarian.

If your foster kittens need to go to the veterinarian, please notify the foster coordinator by phone.

Remember, foster parents will be responsible for payment of any medical care if they take their foster animal to a veterinarian without authorization from the foster coordinator or adoptions manager.

Signs of illness and what to do next

Kittens do a good job of masking when they don't feel well, so determining if a foster kitten is under the weather will require diligent observation of the kittens' daily activity and appetite levels. Be aware that kittens act differently at different ages. For example, a healthy two-week-old kitten will sleep often and get up only to nurse, whereas a healthy six-week-old kitten should have a lot of energy. If you have any questions about the health of your foster kittens, please contact the foster coordinator, who will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Eye discharge. It is normal for kittens to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up. But if a kitten has yellow or green discharge, or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for him to open his eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, you need to contact the foster coordinator to schedule a vet appointment.

Sneezing and nasal discharge. Occasional sneezing is common in kittens. If the sneezing becomes more frequent, examine the discharge coming from the sneeze. If the discharge is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be necessary. But it is important to monitor the kittens in case the problem becomes worse. If the discharge becomes colored, contact the foster coordinator to schedule a vet appointment because the kittens may have a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor the kittens' breathing. If they start to breathe with an open mouth or wheeze, call the foster coordinator immediately and follow the emergency contact protocol. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor the kittens' eating habits more closely to ensure that they are still eating. And, of course, continue to weigh them daily.

Loss of appetite. Your foster kittens may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. Unwillingness to eat in kittens can be very serious, so pay close attention to whether the kittens are eating. Kittens should eat on a four- to eight-hour schedule, depending on their age. If a kitten under four weeks old misses two meals or a kitten over four weeks of age goes more than 12 hours without eating, the foster coordinator should be called. Also, if a kitten less than eight weeks old does not urinate for over 12 hours, call the coordinator. With a kitten who is not eating, please do not change the kitten's diet without contacting the foster department. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which will lead to dehydration.

Lethargy. The activity level of your kittens will vary with each kitten in your litter and with age. Sick kittens may have lower energy levels and just want to sit in your lap or on the floor and not move much or play. If you notice a drop in your foster kittens' energy level, please contact the foster coordinator to make a medical appointment. If a kitten cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, this is an emergency, so you'll need to start the emergency contact protocol. Note: Some undersocialized kittens will move less because they are frightened. If you have a fearful group of kittens, it can be more difficult to determine if their energy levels are low. But tracking all behaviors in your journal will help you decide whether you should call the foster coordinator to schedule a vet appointment.

Dehydration. Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch the kitten's skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the kitten is dehydrated. Please call the foster coordinator immediately and start the emergency contact protocol, as dehydration can be fatal in kittens.

Vomiting. If a foster kitten has thrown up two or more times in one day, please notify the foster coordinator. If there is bile or blood in the vomit, please call right away.

Pain or strain while urinating. When kittens first go into a foster home, they may not urinate due to stress. If a kitten hasn't urinated in more than 24 hours, however, please contact the foster coordinator. Also, if you notice the kitten straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying out when urinating, please contact the foster coordinator immediately because it may be indicative of an infection or a urethral obstruction, which can be life-threatening.

Diarrhea. In kittens, it can be tricky to determine if diarrhea is a problem. Soft stool diarrhea, most likely caused by stress, is normal for the first two days after you take kittens home. Kittens who are nursing tend to have loose stool, but if it is watery or very large in volume, that's a concern. By the time kittens are five weeks old and are eating consistently on their own, they should have firm, normal stool. If your foster kittens have liquid stool, please contact the foster department so that a vet appointment can be scheduled; the kittens may need medication.

Once your kittens are using a litter box, please monitor the box daily. Remember that diarrhea will dehydrate your kittens, so be proactive about contacting the foster department if you notice any diarrhea. If a kitten has bloody or mucoid diarrhea, please contact the foster coordinator immediately and start the emergency phone protocol.



Frequent ear scratching. A foster kitten may have ear mites if she scratches her ears often and/or shakes her head frequently, or if you see a dark discharge that resembles coffee grounds when you look in her ears. Ear mites can be treated by a veterinarian, so please call or email the foster coordinator for a medical appointment.

Hair loss. Please contact the foster department if you notice any hair loss on your foster kittens. It is normal for cats to have thin fur around the lips, eyelids and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair can indicate ringworm or dermatitis. It is important to check your foster kittens' coats every day.

Serious kitten ailments

Kittens are susceptible to these illnesses:

- Fading kitten syndrome: Symptoms include unwillingness to eat, dehydration, lethargy, weight loss, coldness to the touch, and difficulty with breathing or labored breathing.
- Panleukopenia (feline distemper): Symptoms include unwillingness to eat, vomiting, diarrhea and/or dehydration. The diarrhea often has a mucoid texture and/or is bloody.

If a kitten is displaying any combination of the symptoms listed above, please contact the foster coordinator immediately and start the emergency phone protocol. These ailments can be fatal if left untreated.

Criteria for emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a kitten? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you would call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Symptoms of fading kitten syndrome or distemper (see "Serious Kitten Ailments" above)
- Signs of extreme dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on
- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn't stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 12 hours

If a foster kitten displays any of these symptoms, please follow the emergency phone protocol. If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to get help. However, if the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, start the emergency phone protocol. If you think your foster pet may incur permanent damage or pass away if not seen by a veterinarian immediately, please proceed to the approved emergency clinic and start the emergency phone chain on the way.

Emergency Phone Protocol:

Call the shelter at 973-386-0590 Monday – Sunday between 8 am and 4 pm

Rayan Ramadan, Foster Coordinator
Brisa Prada, Veterinary & Foster Assistant
foster@njshelter.org
973-386-0590

Veterinary Technician Team
vettech@njshelter.org
973-386-0590 x 15

Taylor Woehle, Lead Veterinary Technician
vettechmanager@njshelter.org
973-386-0590 x 15

For after hours emergencies the shelter is affiliated with:

Veterinary Emergency Group
<https://veterinaryemergencygroup.com>
(multiple locations in NJ)
201-438-7122

Behavior Support

One of your goals as a foster parent is to help prepare your foster cat for living successfully in a home. So, we ask that you help your foster cat to develop good habits and skills through the use of positive reinforcement, which builds a bond of trust between you and your foster pet. The basic idea is to reward desirable behaviors and ignore unwanted behaviors.

You must not punish a cat for a behavior that you find undesirable because punishment is ineffective at eliminating the behavior. If the cat is doing something undesirable, distract him or her before the behavior occurs. It is also important for every human in the foster home to stick to the rules established for your foster cats, which will help them to learn faster.

Some foster cats will have behavioral issues, which we are aware of at the time of their rescue. Some of these behavior challenges are fearfulness, house soiling or aggression toward other animals. We will only place cats with behavioral issues with a person who feels comfortable working with the cat on his/her particular issues. We will provide that person with all the necessary information so that proper care and training can be given to the foster cat.

If you feel unable to manage any behavior that your foster cat is exhibiting, please contact the foster coordinator during business hours to discuss the issue. We will guide you and help in every way that we can. Thank you so much for opening your heart and your home to foster pets. Together, we can save more lives.

Join the Fear Free Movement

Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter has joined Fear Free Shelters to help educate our community on ways to recognize and reduce fear, anxiety and stress for the animals in our care.

To join the movement, please send an email to Outreach@njshelter.org to receive instructions on how you can become Fear Free certified. Learn more about this program at www.fearfreeshelters.com.



www.fearfreeshelters.org





Mt. Pleasant Animal Shelter
194 State Route 10 West
East Hanover, NJ 07936
973-386-0590
info@njshelter.org

Monday-Sunday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Due to COVID-19, admittance to the shelter is by appointment only.