**Foster Care Handbook**

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**Congratulations and Thank you!**

**You’re taking a powerful role in helping save lives this kitten/puppy season (and beyond) by being a foster parent, and this guide can help you and your new companions be happy and healthy.**

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**Preparing Your Home and Family**

NOTE: Foster kittens and cats must remain indoors only!

Do not let your foster felines outdoors, including in shared hallways, and keep them separated from any resident animals in a confined space such as a roomy crate or in a spare room such as an extra bathroom.

**What You Should Do**

• Remove small, ingestible objects from the environment; this may include small toys or parts of toys, elastic bands, paper clips, string, sewing pins and needles, ornaments, tinsel and more

• Keep toilet bowls closed, especially when small kittens are in the home

• Secure window screens in any open windows no matter how small the opening

• Ensure that side panels on window AC units are securely in place and cannot be moved or opened

• Secure loose electrical wires, cords for window blinds and other potential Hazards

• Remove plants and flowers from the vicinity of your foster animal’s space; many types of decorative vegetation are highly toxic to animals

• Do not offer any human food to your foster animal

• Keep your home reasonably climate-controlled (if it’s too hot for you, it’s likely too hot for your foster)

• Ensure visitors do not leave doors or windows open, and are conscientious about safety measures that are in place for your foster

• Secure/remove household toxins such as cleaning agents, pesticides and solvents

**SUPPLY CHECKLIST**

Supplies: We will provide you with all medical care and medical supplies needed for your foster pet. When possible, we will also provide other supplies.

We will do our best to provide as donations allow, but we cannot guarantee to provide these supplies. Please remember: any money spent on foster care may be tax deductible as donations!

**Strongly Recommended** **Not Needed–But may make your life easier!**

* Food 🐶 🐱 Baby Gate 🐶
* Food bowl 🐶 🐱 Exercise Pen (Xpen) 🐶 🐱
* Water Bowl 🐶 🐱 Brush/comb 🐶 🐱
* Collar 🐶 Nail Trimmers 🐶 🐱
* Leash 🐶 Shampoo/Dawn Dish Soap 🐶 🐱
* Crate 🐶 🐱 Potty Pads 🐶
* Bed 🐶 🐱 Wet food 🐶 🐱
* Toys (hard & soft) 🐶 🐱 Heating pad 🐶 🐱
* Poop Baggies 🐶 Scale (food or postal scale) 🐶 🐱
* Chews 🐶 Scratch pad 🐱
* Treats 🐶 🐱
* Kong 🐶
* First Aid Kit 🐶 🐱
* Litter Box 🐱
* Litter (Non clumping) 🐱
* Formula, syringe/ bottle (KMR for kitten and Esbilac for puppies is the best brand)



Kittens and puppies under five weeks of age may still need an additional heating source since they cannot regulate their body temperature. If this is the case, you will be provided with a heating source to use in their crate. It is very important to make sure that the kitten has an area of the crate with no additional heating where she can go if she becomes too hot.

A towel or blanket should be placed over the heat source. You may also want to cover the crate with a towel or sheet to keep the home draft-free and cozy.



**Getting Acquainted**

Being in a new environment is stressful for most animals, and a normal reaction may be to hide.

Allow your foster time to adjust to your home while being housed in a “safe haven” such as a roomy crate or a separate room. A spare bathroom is ideal since there aren’t hiding spaces and it is easy to disinfect.

Block off small areas where the foster may try to hide and get stuck. Confinement is not harmful or cruel to your foster in any way as long as there is sufficient space for him to stand up, turn around, lie down fully stretched out and rest in an area away from the litter box and food and water bowls.

Scared animals have been known to hurt themselves by wedging themselves inside air-conditioners, heaters, and radiators; behind ovens or inside ceiling tiles—or by dashing out the front door in fear. It is much safer to keep a frightened new foster safely in one pet-proofed room. Open your carrier and let them decide whether they want to explore or wants to remain in the carrier.

Never try to pull your new foster cat out of hiding. Instead, use toys or treats to encourage her to come out. If your foster cat still won’t come out, let her be. Cats need time to adjust to their new environment. Let your foster cat get used to you slowly. Sit in the room and bring treats with you. Read a newspaper or a book out loud while you’re sitting there so the cat gets to know your voice. Offer treats to your foster cat in moderation.

When your cat is eating, drinking, using the litter box and moving around the room in a relaxed manner, he may be ready to explore more of the house (after the initial quarantine period). However, if your cat runs when you enter the room, hides, only eats or uses the litter box at night, slinks around the room with his body low to the ground, hisses, growls or cowers, these are signs of fear and mean he’s not ready to come out of confinement yet. Keep your cat confined and contact the volunteer director if there is no progress after one week.

Some fosters may need less than a day to adjust; others may need days to a week to become comfortable enough to explore the entire house without fear. This is normal behavior.

Dogs should be on a leash at all times when outdoors unless in a private secure fenced in area. Recommended fence height is six feet. Foster dog/puppies are not permitted to go to dog parks. Puppies younger than 5 months should NEVER go to off-leash areas because they are not fully vaccinated. Puppies should not be exposed to other dogs or places frequented by other dogs due to the risk of diseases such as parvovirus.

**Daily Care for Moms with Babies**

Most mothers, even first-timers, can take care of themselves and their offspring quite well. For the most part, you will leave mom and babies alone while observing for any signs of trouble.

In some cases, moms are fostered together with her litter. There are a few things to keep in mind for this type of foster situation. Moms require a calm setting that has privacy and minimal activity. Stress can cause moms to stop taking care of their babies.

Provide a nesting box for nursing mothers so babies can’t get out but mom can when she needs some peace and quiet. Only half of the nesting box should have extra warmth added.

A nursing mother cannot be overfed. Food requirements can increase up to 3 times the normal amount. Leave food out for the mother at ALL times.

**Young Foster Babies Care**

A kitten and puppy’s survival depends on getting consistent nutrition and warmth. The mother’s colostrum, which is the first milk produced, is vitally important to a newborn’s cardiovascular system and defense against disease. Colostrum is rich in antibodies to help protect against various infections, but babies can only absorb these antibodies and benefit from them for a short period after birth.

So-called “Fading Kitten or Puppy Syndrome,” when a newborn fades and dies despite adequate care, is usually due to either a genetic defect or lack of sufficient colostrum. For this reason, it is very important that newborns nurse as soon as possible after birth. If they do not find a nipple on their own, put their mouth close to one and hold them until they nurse.

Continued healthy nursing behavior is crucial for kitten and puppy survival. In order to tell if they are nursing, gently pick up each and feel for a round belly full of milk. A flat or concave belly indicates that they may not be nursing. You should perform this check once or twice a day.

Also, visually confirm that each baby is actually latching onto mom. A gram scale works great to watch each baby’s weight. Healthy kittens and puppies should gain a little weight each day.

**Problem Signs**

During the first two weeks, babies should spend approximately 90% of the time eating and sleeping. If babies are crying during or after eating, they are usually becoming ill or are not getting adequate milk. A newborn is very susceptible to infections and can die within 24 hours. If excessive crying occurs, the mother and entire litter should be examined by a veterinarian, so please call us immediately.

**Supplemental Feeding for Nursing Babies with Mom**

When adequate nursing isn’t possible, supplemental feeding one to three times per day may be recommended, especially for any litter with more than five. We will supply you with liquid or powdered Milk Replacer (KMR or Esbilac) for supplemental feeding.

The temperature of the milk replacer can be tested on your forearm and should be about the same as one’s skin. The milk replacer can give directions concerning feeding amounts.

**NOTE: Do not hold kittens or puppies on their backs like human babies or squeeze the bottle while feeding—this can cause kittens to aspirate the milk, choke and/or catch pneumonia**

If the babies are still nursing from their mother, the amounts recommended will be excessive. Generally, one-third to half of the listed amount should be the daily goal. Supplemental feeding may be continued until neonates are old enough to eat food.

If the mother does not produce milk or her milk becomes infected, the babies will cry excessively. If this occurs, the entire litter could die within 24 to 48 hours. Total replacement feeding, using the milk replacer, or adopting the kittens to another nursing mother, is usually necessary.

If replacement feeding is elected, the amounts of milk listed on the milk replacer container should be fed. Kittens and puppies less than two weeks of age should be fed every 3 to 4 hours. 2 to 4 weeks old babies do well with feedings every 4 to 6 hours. Don’t feel like you have to wake them up to feed—if they’re full enough to sleep peacefully, let them rest until they wake up hungry.



**Daily Care for Orphaned Babies**

Please note that young kittens are extremely fragile, and some may die no matter how well you take care of them (sometimes 1 out of 4 in the first week alone). Remain attentive to your foster kittens and provide them with the best possible care; as difficult as it is to lose a foster pet, you should not blame yourself. In the unfortunate event that your foster kitten passes away, contact the shelter as soon as possible.

**Daily Care for Newborns** (0-3 weeks old)

Young neonates need to be fed every 2-4 hours throughout the day and night. Sometimes bottle feeding can be challenging, and if your baby will not take the milk replacer from the bottle you may wait until the next feeding to try again. However, if your baby has not eaten in two consecutive feedings, please contact us right away.

Milk Replacer formula will be provided for all neonates requiring bottle feeding. Please follow the directions provided with the milk replacer to mix the formula (one part formula to two parts water). For the first couple of feedings, you may increase the amount of water slightly to dilute the formula and help reduce digestive upset.

Mixed formula that has not been warmed can be saved in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours. The unmixed powder formula should also be kept in the refrigerator after being opened and be kept for up to 3 months.

Prepare only the amount of formula your litter of kittens will need for each feeding. Kittens will usually need about 4mL per 100g of body weight per feeding, or about 30mL over a 24-hour period. Formula should be warmed by placing the bottle of cold milk replacer upright in a mug of hot water. Check the temperature of the formula on the inside of your wrist before feeding each baby. The temperature should be warm to the touch but not hot. Don’t boil or microwave, this will destroy the nutritional value.

Kittens should weigh about 4 ounces at birth and be handles minimally

The puppies’ weight will vary according to their breed, but they should be gaining about 1 - 1 ½ grams per day for each pound of anticipated adult weight. They should be handled as little as possible.

**Safe Feeding**

DO NOT feed them cow’s milk, cats are actually lactose intolerant and there are not enough nutrients for kittens, they will slowly starve to death.

You should also test the nipple on your bottle and make sure the formula drips out slowly. It is very easy for the foster to aspirate (inhale fluids into the lungs). If formula comes out of their nose, stop feeding immediately.

Do not feed any more until the baby has completely cleared the fluid from its lungs, usually by sneezing. If crackling or popping is heard as he breathes, or if you suspect your baby may have aspirated formula, contact us immediately.

Kittens and puppies should be warm before feeding to digest food properly. Prepare them for feeding by placing them on their stomachs or wrapping them in a small towel like a taco if they are fussy.

If wrapped in a towel, make sure to place on the stomach, is in an upright position with her head tilted slightly up and neck extended (as if she was nursing from mom).

The kitten can still knead with her forelegs outside of the towel and that she is not on her back, which can cause aspiration.

Support the lower body with the palm of your hand and hold the head steady with your thumb and forefinger. Never force milk down by squeezing the bottle since this can cause aspiration. Bottle feeding takes practice and patience to master.

Make sure you do not overfeed by checking the tummy for fullness while feeding. After bottle feeding, gently burp by placing by placing her on her stomach in the palm of one hand and patting her on the back a few times with the other hand. This will allow any air ingested to be expelled, however, you won’t hear the kitten or puppy “burp”.

Clean out your bottle with soap and water between feedings.

After finishing feeding, you must now stimulate the baby to urinate and defecate. They should defecate at least once a day and should urinate every time.

**Elimination**

If you are fostering orphans, or mom is unable to care for her babies, it is necessary to stimulate the neonate, less than 3 weeks of age, to urinate and defecate.

The voiding reflex is normally initiated by the mother licking the kitten’s ano-genital region.

The foster caregiver must therefore imitate this by gently massaging the neonate’s ano-genital area with a warm damp cloth or cotton ball. This should be done after each feeding, and each baby should pass urine and have a bowel movement at least once a day.

**Daily Care for Babies Transitioning to Wet Food** (3-5 weeks)

Transitioning kittens should be fed “gruel,” which is a pudding-like consistency mix of milk replacer or water and wet food. They should be fed every 4-6 hours and supplemental bottle feeding may be necessary if they are not taking to the canned food. You are welcome to experiment with different consistencies, but the gruel should be gradually thickened to get them ready for solid food. Leftover gruel should be discarded immediately if not eaten. Canned food that has not been made into gruel yet can be covered and refrigerated for up to 48 hours.

Once babies have teeth, they could start to chew the nipple on a bottle, which can be very dangerous due to small pieces being ingested. This must be monitored closely.

Fresh water should be provided at all times for transitioning.

To encourage to eat the gruel, place a small amount on a small spoon or tongue depressor and place it on their tongue or lips. The goal is that she will eat on her own from a plate or bowl. This transition period can take days to weeks. A variety of wet food is good to feed but avoid fish & seafood flavors.

At this age, stimulating should no longer be necessary and will begin urinating and defecating on their own. Continue until you notice urine and feces in the housing area.

Small litter boxes with non-clumping litter or puppy pads should be provided at this stage.

Kittens will eventually learn how to use a litter box on their own but accidents are common for the first few weeks. If they defecate outside, move the feces to the litter box. You can also place kittens inside their litter box after meals.

Puppies will eventually learn the areas to urinate and defecate but accidents are common for the first few weeks. If defecating off the pad, move feces to the puppy pad. You can also place puppies on the pads after meals.

The puppies’ eyes will open between 10-14 days. They open gradually starting from the nose outward.

The kittens’ eyes will open between 8-14 days. They open gradually starting from the nose outward. Short-haired cats’ eyes usually open earlier than those with longer hair. kittens will begin to develop complete sound and sight orientation.

**At 4 weeks old Kittens should now weigh about a pound.**

Kittens and puppies will begin to clean themselves, although their mother will continue to do most of the serious cleaning.

**Daily Care for babies Eating on their Own** (5-8+ weeks)

Kittens and puppies who are eating completely on their own will need to be fed wet food about three times throughout the day. They should always have dry food and water available.

Don’t forget to clean their litter box and kennel at least once day (and focus on and enjoy this socialization period!).

Some will begin lapping right away, while others will prefer to lick it from your fingers. Allow them to do so and slowly lower your finger to a shallow dish. The puppies may bite the edge of the plate or walk in the food.

Nursing sessions should be brief and infrequent, if they take place at all.

The babies should now eat dry food. Canned food can be more for a treat in the mornings.

The puppies should continue to gain 1 - 1 ½ grams per day for each pound of anticipated adult weight.

By the end of week 8, kittens should weigh 2 pounds and be ready to be adopted.

**Grooming, Bathing, Socializing, and Training**

**Grooming & Bathing**

Neonates should be kept clean and will often need bathing since they are so messy.

Less is more for bathing neonates.

Try to spot clean by only rinsing with warm water where he is dirty, such as his bottom. Make sure to not get a lot of water on his head, especially the eyes, nose and ears. If there is food stuck on his face, use a warm damp cloth.

Babies cannot be put back into their home until they are completely dry. You can use a blow dryer on the lowest setting (warm not hot) after towel drying.

**Socializing Your Foster**

Socialization is critical for young foster, and they will need multiple short socialization sessions on a daily basis, as well as playtime and enrichment to help them learn to enjoy being around people.

Please follow these steps for socializing fosters:

• Keep them confined to a dog crate in a quiet room for the first few days to make sure they are eating well & adjusting to the new environment. Offer them their carrier without its door or a cardboard box inside the crate and cover the crate with a sheet so they feel more secure.

• The crate should be in a secure, pet-proof room where they cannot run away and hide once you start letting them out of the crate.

• Once they are eating well and comfortable, allow them to explore the pet-proofed area when supervised; keep them confined when not supervised.

• If they foster is under-socialized make sure to use every meal time as a socialization event. Offer food and sit with them while they eat. Eventually work toward putting the food on your finger and having them eat it from there. Once they are comfortable with this, slowly bring the food closer to you so that they have to climb on your lap to get the food. Progress to petting them while they eat, starting with their face and shoulders. Eventually work on handling more and more and then finally, picking up.

• Short socialization sessions (3-5 minutes) several times a day are better than one or two long sessions.

• Once they become social with you, have friends or family interact with them too, so that they learn to be social with everyone

• Work on getting them used to household noises and voices by slowly introducing them (i.e. talking in a normal voice, laughing, opening cabinets, etc.)

• Always pair food or playtime with your presence, whether or not you are touching/interacting with them.

• Give them safe objects to explore, such as paper towel rolls and cardboard boxes.

• Allow them to walk on different surfaces and explore when supervised.

• Familiarize them with the sound everyday household things like the television, radio, moving objects, ect.

**Do not allow them to play with your hands or feet. This will encourage play biting which will continue and be painful once they get older. Never scold, tap on the nose, or yell no at a puppy or kitten who is biting. Bite inhibition is a crucial development. A puppy or kitten who is punished for biting can turn into an adult with unsafe jaws (because they do not know their jaw strength). Simply yell “ouch” when they bite too hard.**

**When they stop biting, then praise him/her lavishly**

**House-Training a puppy**

When the puppies reach about 4 weeks of age, they will begin to eliminate on their own. With many puppies it is best to only have them eliminate outside to prevent any confusion about proper elimination areas. Be sure to take them out several times a day, after naps, eating and playing. Gently put the puppy on the grass and praise if they use the spot to eliminate. It is, of course, common for them to make mistakes. If you find feces outside of the appropriate area, take them to the appropriate area and set down. This should help remind the puppies where they are supposed to eliminate. It is a good idea to confine them to a relatively small area because they may forget where to eliminate if they have too much room. Make sure to always keep the area cleaned and away from their food and water. Remember, diligence, consistency and positive reinforcement go a long way!

**Litter Box Training**

When the kittens reach about 4 weeks of age, they will begin to eliminate on their own. You can create a small litter box out of a drawer organizer, old cake pan, Tupperware, just be sure it is something you won’t be using for humans again. Avoid exposing kittens to clumping litter this early because it’s dangerous if ingested and they may try to eat it. Most kittens learn from watching mom and will use the litter box right away. You can encourage kittens by showing them the litter box several times a day, especially after naps and meals. Gently take a paw and scratch at the litter. Be sure to praise the kittens when they start using the litter box. It is, of course, common for them to make mistakes.

 If you find feces outside of the litter box, pick up and place inside the litter box. It is a good idea to confine them to a relatively small area because they may forget where the litter box is located if they have too much room.

Make sure to always keep the litter box cleaned and away from their food and water.

**Crate Training your Foster Dog**

A crate is a great way to keep both your foster dog and your home safe. If you decide to use a crate, make sure that the crate is always a positive place for your dog. Never use a crate for punishment. When introducing a dog to a crate, us a happy tone of voice and tell the dog to “kennel up”. Once the dog has entered the crate, give lots of praise and perhaps a small treat as a reward. If you have a difficult time getting the dog to enter the crate, or if they seem afraid, try leaving the crate door open and placing the food and water just inside the door.

Allow the dog to wander into the crate and eat at their leisure. Once the dog seems more comfortable with the crate, you can try confining the dog to the crate for short intervals. Even just 10 seconds to start is good.

**Never confine a puppy to a crate for longer than 4 hours at a time, or an adult for longer than 8 hours at a time**. Remember dogs will not want to soil where they sleep and will need to relieve themselves.

**Chewing**

Destructive chewing is a phase that all puppies go through, even kittens can chew. It usually starts around 3 months and can last until the dog is over 1 year old. During this time, the dog’s adult teeth are coming in and chewing helps to relieve the pain. Adult dogs may also have problems with chewing, but for different reasons. Adult dogs usually chew on inappropriate things because they are anxious or bored, or because they have never been taught what is inappropriate to chew on.

The best solution for destructive chewing is providing your foster dog with something that is acceptable to chew on. Have plenty of chew toys available at all times. If you catch the dog chewing on something inappropriate, tell the dog “NO” in a firm (but not angry) voice, and replace the item with something more appropriate.

If the destructive chewing occurs when you are away, consider confining the dog to a crate. A crate will help keep both the dog and your home safe. It is also important that your foster dog is getting plenty of exercise. A well exercised dog is a well-behaved dog. If they are bored then any attention will do, good or bad.





**Cleaning & Sanitizing During and After Foster Stays**

The most common disease organisms seen in foster animals are viruses, bacteria, parasites and fungi. It is very important to repeatedly and thoroughly clean and disinfect any areas of your home where your foster pets are—and any objects foster pets contact.

Daily and weekly cleanings will help keep your foster kittens and any other animals happy and healthy. A more thorough sanitation will be needed between each new foster pet that comes to your home.

Routine practices to control disease transmission include:

• Cleaning and disinfecting items in the isolation area using the appropriate products

• Setting up an isolation area for foster animals

• Practicing good hand hygiene before and after handing animals or objects in the isolation area

**Cleaning and Disinfecting Products**

Soaps and detergents are not the same as disinfectants. It’s important to understand how these two groups of products work and to use them appropriately.

• Soaps and detergents are cleaning agents that work by suspending dirt and grease and breaking up organic matter. Soaps do not necessarily kill germs. Dish and laundry soaps are common examples of detergents.

• Disinfectants are chemical solutions that kill germs. The particular germs killed depend on the ingredients in the disinfectant. While some disinfectants serve a dual purpose and have some cleansing properties, many disinfectants do not effectively remove dirt and grease. In general, disinfectants must be applied to already cleaned surfaces and allowed to remain in contact with the surface for a minimum period of time in order to be effective.

**Choosing Detergents and Disinfectants for the Home**

When making the choice of a particular product for your foster home, it is necessary to understand the active ingredients, strength, required contact time, effect against typical shelter diseases and any potential side effects.

You also will want to check on the product’s availability, since there are many products but (with the exception of standard household bleach) very few can be bought at the grocery store, are safe for felines and effective against common diseases.

For this reason, we recommend using a basic dish soap and water wash followed by thorough rinsing and then disinfecting with diluted bleach.

**The Foster/Isolation Area**

Your area should include the following components:

• Isolation from other pets in home

• Pet-proof

• Surfaces that are easy to clean and disinfect (vinyl or tile floor, not carpet)

• Stocked with supplies that are dedicated to the area and easy to sanitize

• A good, ideally separate, source of ventilation

• Low human traffic

It is important that all items and area used by a sick foster animal be cleaned thoroughly. You can use a 10% bleach solution to reliably kill most viruses and bacteria. Items to be cleaned should be thoroughly wetted with the bleach solution and allowed to stand for several minutes before rinsing.

Foster home that have recently fostered an animal with panleukopenia (feline distemper), Parvovirus or another extremely contagious disease may be asked to wait several months or more before fostering another unvaccinated puppy or kitten.

**Hand Hygiene**

Hand washing is critical—it is the most important way of reducing transmission of disease between animals. Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling animals or items in the animals’ environment.

Thorough hand washing procedure:

• Wet hands with warm (not hot) water

• Apply liquid or foam soap (1-2 pumps)

• Vigorously lather for a minimum of 15 seconds

• Rinse thoroughly

• Pat hands dry

**Using Bleach as a Disinfectant**

The recommended dilution of standard non-color safe 5.25% household bleach for most agents of disease is 1 part bleach to 32 parts water (1/2 cup bleach to 1 gallon water). Bleach needs to be mixed fresh daily. The recommended contact time is 10 minutes. Bleach is then rinsed off and the surface allowed to dry.

**Do Not Use**

Phenol-based products are known to be toxic to cats and should not be used. If unsure about a product, a good rule of thumb is to avoid if the name contains “sol”.

**Typical Sanitation Procedure for the Home**

All surfaces may not be easily cleaned and disinfected in the typical foster environment, but thorough and repeated washing and vacuuming helps in decreasing the number of germs in the environment.

**Safety Tips**

1. Keep your foster cat indoors at all times.
2. Let the Humane Society know if you are no longer able to care for your foster cat. Do not give your foster cat to another person or agency without first receiving permission from the Humane Society.
3. Do not keep collars on your foster cat unless they are break-away. They could become hung up on something and injure or accidentally hang themselves.
4. Always keep an ID tag attached to a properly fitted collar that will remain on your foster dog at all times.
5. Always Keep your foster dog under your control, going outside only on a leash or into a securely fenced area.

**Medical Information & Common Diseases**

All our foster will have spent at least a small amount of time in the shelter it is very difficult to ensure that they will be healthy.

Many of our animals are strays from a rural environment with no vaccination of previous history available. A cat or dog that appears healthy initially could easily begin to show signs of illness several days later, even after having been vaccinated. For this reason, it is very important that foster homes keep their own pets up to date on vaccinations.

Cats are relatively easy to keep separate so we encourage foster home to isolate foster cats in a separate room or large kennel for a period of at least one week up to two weeks. Most illnesses should be apparent within the two-week time frame. We also suggest that foster homes provide foster cats with separate food bowls, water bowls, and litter boxes for the duration of their stay.

Fostering a dog or puppy can be an extremely rewarding experience. While perhaps slightly more involved than fostering a cat, fostering a dog can be very satisfying and a lot of fun. Dogs can be harder to keep isolated then cats, but it is still recommended to have an initial period away from your current pets of 5-10 days.

**Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)**

Viral and bacterial respiratory infections are very common in cats, especially young or stressed ones. Symptoms include clear to colored discharge from eyes and/or nose, loss of appetite, depression, congestion, sneezing, coughing, fever, etc.

Wash your hands thoroughly after handling an animal with visible URI symptoms and before contact with any other cats as URI is extremely contagious. URI is similar to a human cold but is generally not transmittable to people or other animal species except for cats. Any cat showing signs of an upper respiratory infection should be isolated from other cats in the household.

**Conjunctivitis**

Symptoms include clear or colored eye discharge, painful eyes, eyes that are crusted shut or swollen.

Ocular antibiotics and ointments are often required. Some viral upper respiratory infections can cause corneal ulcers, which are emergencies. A painful eye should always be examined by a vet. Many causes of conjunctivitis are contagious.

**Internal Parasites**

Foster animals are routinely treated for some internal parasites, but there are many potential parasites that may be present, and sometimes repeated treatments are required. Common parasites include but are not limited to Coccidia, Giardia, roundworms, tapeworms and hookworms.

If parasites are observed or suspected, a fresh fecal sample may be requested for evaluation which can be brought to the shelter. Signs of parasites may include a large, hard belly, diarrhea, worms in vomit or the stool, tapeworm segments (similar in appearance to grains of rice) around the anus, a scruffy looking coat, and/or an inability to gain weight. Some parasites are contagious to other animals through direct or indirect contact with infected feces. Most of these parasites require medication.

**Fleas**

Fleas feed on the blood of cats, dogs, humans and other animals and can transmit disease. Signs include intense itching and scratching and fur loss, particularly along the back and at base of tail.

**Earmites**

Earmites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. They can cause itching, scratching, head-shaking and dark brown discharge in the ears that often looks like dirt or coffee grounds. They are contagious to other cats and dogs, but usually require direct contact with the infected animal to be spread. Treatment is needed if they have earmites.

**Panleukopenia**

Panleukopenia is a viral infection that most commonly affects kittens, young cats and unvaccinated felines. Panleukopenia has a very high mortality rate, even with treatment.

Unfortunately, this illness can be frustrating to deal with because the virus can survive in the environment for years. This means that other unvaccinated cats/kittens can become infected with panleukopenia simply by coming into contact with places where an infected cat has been. Symptoms include fever, diarrhea, lethargy, vomiting, loss of appetite and even sudden death.

The virus is highly contagious to other cats, especially through contact with infected feces or vomit but also contact with contaminated objects such as bowls, hands, clothes, etc.

**Parvovirus**

Parvovirus is a disease that is most common in puppies and young dogs. It causes the sloughing of the lining of the intestinal tract. Parvo can survive in the environment for 6 months or longer. This means that other unvaccinated dogs can become infected by simply coming into contact with places or objects that an infected dog has been.

**Bordetella**

Kennel Cough is a respiratory tract infection that has been linked to several different viral and bacterial causes. Coughing is usually stimulated by physical exertion or by touching the throat area. Kennel cough is self-limiting, usually lasting 1-3 weeks. Antibiotics are often given to prevent secondary infections. Kennel cough is very common in shelters and other boarding facilities.

**Distemper**

Distemper is a highly contagious and fatal disease that attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems. It is transmitted through direct contact with contaminated saliva, blood, or urine. Signs to look for are severe upper Rrspiratory infection or Pneumonia, lethargy, or neurological signs such as seizure activity, convulsions, and partial or complete paralysis.

**Signs of Illness and What to do Next**

Pets generally do a good job of masking when they don’t feel well, so determining if your foster is under the weather will require diligent observation of the foster’s daily activity and appetite levels. It’s a good idea to keep track of these levels in a journal. You’ll also want to record any of the following symptoms, which could be signs of illness.

**Eye Discharge**

 It is normal to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up and some may have more than others, depending on the breed and species. But if your foster 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 shelter to schedule a check-up.

**Coughing and Nasal Discharge**

Coughing can be common if your foster is pulling on leash. If the coughing becomes more frequent, however, watch for discharge coming from the nose. If the discharge is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be needed, but check with the shelter to find out if a check-up is necessary.

If the discharge becomes colored, make an appointment with the shelter because it may have become a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor their breathing. If they seems to struggle to breathe or starts wheezing, call the shelter. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor their eating habits more closely to ensure that he or she is still eating. Give wet food or watering down dry food may be needed to keep them eating.

**Loss of Appetite**

Your foster may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. But if they hasn’t eaten after 24 hours, please notify the shelter. Also, if the dog or cat has been eating well, but then stops eating for 12 to 24 hours, call the shelter to set up a check-up appointment. Please do not change the fosters diet without contacting shelter. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

**Lethargy**

The activity level of your foster will vary depending on age and personality. Keeping an activity log and journal will help you notice whether your foster is less active than he normally is. If they cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, it’s an emergency, so contact the shelter immediately.

**Dehydration**

Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch their skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the foster is dehydrated. Please call the shelter the next business day to schedule a check-up appointment.

**Vomiting**

Sometimes animals will eat too quickly and will immediately throw up their food. Occasional vomiting isn’t cause for alarm, but if your foster has thrown up two or more times in one day, please notify the shelter. It could be indicative of infection.

**Pain or Strain while Urinating**

When they first go into a foster home, he or she may not urinate due to stress. If the dog or cat hasn’t urinated in more than 24 hours, however, please contact the shelter. Also, if you notice the animal straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying out when urinating, please contact the shelter immediately because it may be indicative of an infection or an obstruction.

**Diarrhea**

It is important to monitor your foster’s pooping habits daily. Soft stool is normal for the first two or three days after taking them home, most likely caused by stress and a change in food. If your foster has liquid stool, however, please contact the shelter so that an appointment can be scheduled to ensure that the dog or cat doesn’t need medications. A fecal may need to be done to rule out parasites. Keep in mind that diarrhea will dehydrate the dog or cat, so be proactive about contacting the shelter. If your foster has bloody or mucoid diarrhea, please contact the shelter immediately.

**Frequent Ear Scratching**

Your foster may have a bacterial, yeast infection or ear mites if scratching ears often and/or shakes their head frequently. These conditions can be treated, so please call the shelter to schedule a check-up appointment.

**Swollen, Irritated Ears**

 If your foster has irritated, swollen or red or pink ears that smell like yeast, he may have an ear infection called otitis. This type of infection is more common in dogs who have very floppy ears, like basset hounds or Labradors but can happen in all dogs and cats. These animals may need to have their ears cleaned more often to ensure that the infection does not re-occur.

**Hair Loss**

Please contact the shelter if you notice any hair loss on your foster. It is normal for dogs and 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, dermatitis, the early stages of mange, fleas, or other external parasites. It is important to check your foster’s coat often.

**Veterinary Care**

**Medical Appointments**

The timing and location of exams, boosters and any other medical will be provided to you by the shelter.

Routine veterinary care is provided by the staff at The Humane Society of Otter Tail County during normal business hours. The shelter will work directly with local veterinarians to manage the health and well-being of each foster pet or litter.

Humane Society of Otter Tail County has a policy that we will not reimburse individuals for vet bills for foster animals when taken for veterinary care outside of that which is pre-authorized by the staff.

**Vaccines**

Kittens and puppies receive vaccinations every three weeks from the time they are 6-8 weeks of age until they are 12 weeks or unless otherwise directed by our veterinarians. Animals need to be 12 weeks and older to receive a Rabies vaccine.

Cats & kittens receive FVRCP Vaccine (feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus and panleukopenia)

Dogs & Puppies receive the DHPP Vaccine (Distemper, Hepatitis, Parvovirus, Parainfluenza) and Bordetella.

**Emergency Information**

**What constitutes an emergency?**

An emergency is any situation in which a foster animal’s life is in danger. The following are specific examples of emergency situations.

**Illness**

If your foster animal becomes severely ill, please contact the Humane Society right away. Indications of severe illness include lethargy, severe vomiting and/or diarrhea, or signs that an animal is in pain.

**Trauma**

If your foster animal sustains any kind of traumatic injury, please contact the shelter as soon as possible. If the injuries are severe an emergency visit at a veterinary clinic will need to be done.

**Lost Pets**

If your foster animal becomes lost, please contact the shelter as soon as possible. Also contact area veterinary clinics. We are a very large county and sometimes animals will be brought to vet clinics for us to pick up. You can also contact the police dispatch incase someone has made a found report with them.

**Humane Society 218-739-3494 Police Dispatch Number 218-998-8555**

You can also stop at the shelter with foster animal anytime during weekday business hours if an emergency arises but calling to make sure staff has the resources is reccomended. Open hours M-F 10-5 and Sat 10-3 (Someone may not be able to help on weekends)

Staff will give out their personal phone numbers to fosters upon request for emergency only

**Getting Ready for Adoptions**

When your foster is transferred back to the shelter for adoption, we gladly welcome any information such as written stories or pictures (photographs or drawings) that would describe your foster pet to a potential adopter.

All foster parents can promote the adoption of their foster pet to friends, family, and other potential adopters. All potential adopters need to fill out an adoption application before approval and adoption.

If the foster family is interested in adopting that is great. We try to keep some distance between fostering and adopting of animals due to some issue in the past. If interested in adoption of one of your foster pets the shelter will need you to fill out an adoption application before an adoption can take place. Adoption fees will apply.

We accept applications for adoption in person, via e-mail or fax. People can pick them up from the shelter if they have no access to our website, or have them e-mailed upon request.

Shelter employees welcome your input and impressions of people interested in your foster animal. You may see or hear something we do not that will sway the application either way. Under no circumstances is an animal to be sent with someone without prior approval from the Humane Society. Paperwork needs to be completed and the adoption fee needs to be paid.

All of our adoptable pets can be viewed via our website at www.humanesocietyotc.org or at our shelter located at 1933 W. Fir Avenue Fergus Falls, MN 56537.

