

Foster Care Neonate Program



Public Handout



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eastbayspca.org



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About the East Bay SPCA

Our Mission

The East Bay SPCA is committed to the welfare of cats and dogs in the communities we serve. We strive to eliminate animal cruelty, neglect and overpopulation by providing programs and education that support people and companion animals.

The East Bay SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) has been concerned with animal welfare for over 135 years. We have been providing shelter, health care, and adoption services for unwanted animals since 1874.

We are committed to finding homes for adoptable cats and dogs, providing affordable veterinary and spay/neuter services, and educating the public on responsible pet ownership. We serve Alameda and Contra Costa Counties and operate two adoption and education centers, two spay/neuter surgery centers, a full-service veterinary clinic, dog training courses and a Humane Education department.

Neonatal Animal Care Program

For the purposes of our program, we will define neonatal as kittens or puppies 3 weeks of age and under. At this age they are extremely delicate and unable to sustain themselves without the assistance of their mother.

When neonatal animals arrive at the shelter without their mother then they will rely solely on you for everything from nutrition, protection and warmth. Animals that are under 3 weeks of age are unable to regulate their own body temperature so it will be up to you to keep them in a warm, draft-free, dry environment.



Introduction

Things to Consider Before Fostering Neonates

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, neonatal animals become ill and pass away in the foster home. The mortality rate of underage kittens is high. This is especially true for neonatal kittens and puppies as they do not have their mother during the most crucial time during their development. This is the hardest thing about fostering and if this is a possibility that you would not want to risk encountering, perhaps fostering older animals or animals in our shelter would be a better fit.

When kittens thrive in your care it can be very difficult to let them go once the time comes for adoption. You can always adopt your foster animal (the regular fees apply and they must still return to our facility for spay/neuter and a microchip). However, please consider the difficulty you would have in returning your foster animals before you begin fostering.

Basic Care and Supplies

Neonates must be fed every 2-3 hours from when they're newborns to 3 weeks, this includes feedings in the middle of the night. Neonates that are 4 weeks and older can go longer between feedings, generally between 4-6 hours. Kittens/puppies will usually cry when they're hungry. If they cry between feedings, you can offer them a smaller meal (although not an entire feeding, since overfeeding can lead to problems as well).

Neonates will need to be stimulated to eliminate after each feeding- Neonates under 3-4 weeks of age cannot go to the bathroom by themselves. They will need assistance from you to stimulate them after each feeding. See the section titled "After Feeding Ritual" on page 4 for more details.

- If a animal becomes chilled, feels cold to the touch, then you must determine if the animal is in need of immediate medical attention. Please refer to the section titled "Fading Animal Syndrome" located on pages 9-11. If you determine that the kitten or puppy is not fading, then warm it immediately by wrapping it in a towel and placing it on its heating source.
- For warmth place a snuggle safe disk, wrapped in a blanket, into the animal's carrier. After heating always wrap the disk in a blanket as direct contact with the animal could lead to serious burns. If you do not have a snuggle safe disk then please ask and we can provide one for you.
- If a snuggle safe disk is not available then a heating pad set on low can be used as a substitute. Once again, make sure to place a towel or blanket over the heating source to avoid the animal receiving burns.
- It is important that the animal's carrier has a place where the animals can move to if they start to overheat.
- Bedding must be dry at all times, the best time to check this is after each feeding. If the bedding is damp then change it immediately. Even while using a heating source, damp bedding will chill the animal and place its life in jeopardy.

Basic Care and Supplies

Animal Specific Bottles, Syringes and Nipples	Use only animal specific bottles to feed and sterilize prior to use. You may also have to make your own holes in the nipple with a sterilized pin or razor. The opening should only be large enough to allow the formula to drip out slowly when the bottle is turned upside down.
Formula	We most commonly use KMR (Kitten Meal Replacement) and ESBILAC for puppies. Other brands will have their ratios printed on their labels.
Carrier/Crate	Please always use an appropriately sized carrier to transport your foster
Bedding	Appropriate bedding includes items that can be bleached and sanitized.
Kitchen Scale	The scale should be sensitive to ounces or grams. This is used to keep track of kittens and puppies weights.
Heating Source	Most commonly we use Snuggle Safe brand warming pads that can be reheated in the microwave. These will provide long lasting heat for up to 8
Monitoring Sheets	These will be important to keep track of weights and any symptoms that



Feeding

Bottle Feeding

It is important to never feed your foster animal cow's milk as it will cause diarrhea. Instead only use a kitten or puppy formula, such as KMR for kittens or Esbilac for puppies. If you are using powdered formula, it should be refrigerated or frozen after opening to help extend shelf life.

Use only animal specific bottles to feed and sterilize prior to use. You may also have to make your own holes in the nipple with a sterilized pin or razor. The opening should only be large enough to allow the formula to drip out slowly when the bottle is turned upside down. If the formula comes out too fast then you run the risk of aspirating your foster animal.

Aspiration is the act when the animal accidentally inhales the formula into its lungs. Signs of aspiration are a milky bubble or milk coming out the animal's nose. If that is the case, immediately turn the animal upside down and rub or pat his chest to help clear her lungs.

It is of up-most importance that you **NEVER** feed a chilled/cold animal. Chilled neonates are not capable of properly digesting their food. If they are too cold then it may be detrimental to the animal's health and their formula may lower their body temperature even further.

Puppies

Puppies need about 30ml of formula per 3.5 ounces of weight per day for the first week and 20ml of formula per 3.5 ounces of weight each day for the next three weeks. Divide this amount into eight to 12 servings each day, feeding approximately two to three hours apart, from a bottle.

Kittens

Kittens should receive 5 grams of formula per 100 grams of body weight. Because of their small size, it is recommended to weigh them both before and after feedings.



KMR (Kitten Meal Replacement) and Esbilac Mixing Directions:

- Unless otherwise directed, feedings should be mixed at a 2:1 ratio. 2 parts water to 1 part KMR.

Tips

- Mix thoroughly as powdered formula tends to clump easily. Clumping can cause the nipple to clog or can accidentally lodge in the neonate's throat.
- After mixing into a solution, store excess formula in a covered container and place it in the refrigerator. Reconstituted formula must be used within 24 hours of mixing. Never leave the formula unrefrigerated as it will grow bacteria rapidly and spoil which can be deadly if consumed by neonates.
- Wash the bottle and nipple after each feeding, disinfect feeding supplies every 24 hours.
- Conversions: 1 tbsp = 15 mL = 15 cc; 28g = 1 oz.; 16 oz = 1 lb

Formula should always be fed warm (approx. 100 degrees F). Do not microwave the formula; although you may microwave the water in a glass cup before placing the bottle in the water. Test a few drops on the back of your hand to make sure it is warm but not hot.

PUPPY/KITTEN WEIGHT	TOTAL DAILY AMOUNT	PER FEEDING AMOUNT FOR NEWBORN (EVERY 3 TO 4 HOURS)	PER FEEDING AMOUNT FOR OLDER PUPPY/KITTEN (EVERY 6 TO 8 HOURS)
4 oz.	2 Tbsp.	5 mL	10 mL
6 oz.	3 Tbsp.	7.5 mL	15 mL
8 oz.	4 Tbsp.	10 mL	20 mL
10 oz.	5 Tbsp.	12.5 mL	25 mL
12 oz.	6 Tbsp.	15 mL	30 mL
14 oz.	7 Tbsp.	17.5 mL	35 mL
16 oz.	8 Tbsp.	20 mL	40 mL
18 oz.	9 Tbsp.	22.5 mL	45 mL
20 oz.	10 Tbsp.	25 mL	50 mL
22 oz.	11 Tbsp.	27.5 mL	55 mL
24 oz.	12 Tbsp.	30 mL	60 mL
26 oz.	13 Tbsp.	32.5 mL	65 mL
28 oz.	14 Tbsp.	35 mL	70 mL
30 oz.	15 Tbsp.	37.5 mL	75 mL
32 oz.	16 Tbsp.	40 mL	80 mL

Feeding

Bottle Feeding Techniques

- Kittens and puppies should be fed lying flat on their stomach. This is a natural position for feeding and will reduce the risk of accidentally aspirating the animal.
- Gently insert the nipple into the animal's mouth using a prying motion while you apply pressure to the sides of the bottle to release a drop or two of milk. This should encourage the animal to suckle on its own. Never squeeze the bottle to force formula out as it will increase the risk of aspirating the animal.
- Do not over feed, it is safer to feed smaller amounts more frequently than larger amounts less frequently. All bottles have measurements on them so you'll know how much you're offering the animal and how much they're drinking. (Tip: if measuring on the bottle is becoming difficult, you can weigh the bottle before and after feeding to use as a way of tracking their formula intake.)
- If milk bubbles out of the animal's nose while nursing, stop feeding immediately! Gently hold the animal upside down to allow the formula to drain from the its lungs. If the animal's lungs sound raspy, contact your local emergency hospital.
 - This could be due to having too large a hole in the nipple, overfeeding, or squeezing the bottle during feeding. **If the nipple flows faster than a couple of drops at a time when turned upside down, replace the nipple with one with a smaller opening.**



After Feeding Ritual

Burping – Just like with a baby, after each feeding you will need to burp the neonate to release any air they may have swallowed during nursing. If this air is not released it can cause gastrointestinal discomfort.

- Hold the animal upright with its tummy against your shoulder and pat it gently, but firmly on its back until it burps.
- For kittens or smaller puppies, hold the animal with its tummy against the palm of your hand and gently, yet firmly, pat its back until it burps. This can take up to 10 minutes before the animal will burp. **Don't expect an actual burp, instead you should hear little gurgling noises.**



Stimulating - After each meal and after being burped, the animal must be stimulated to urinate and defecate. Neonates under 3-4 weeks cannot go to the bathroom by themselves; they need their mom or someone to stimulate them after each feeding.

- This is done by gently massaging their genitalia and rectum with a cotton ball or non-alcohol baby wipe to help aid urination and defecation.
- Use a front to back motion with very gentle pressure. This motion simulates the mother's tongue licking them there to get them to potty.
- You'll need to stimulate them after each feeding until they demonstrate that they can go to the bathroom on their own. Neonates usually cannot eliminate on their own until the age of 3-4 weeks or older.
- Neonates will always urinate each time during stimulation but will typically only defecate once a day.
- Once they have finished eliminating, stop rubbing. Over-stimulation will irritate the area and cause swelling and chafing.



Cleaning - Because neonates are young with undeveloped immune systems, it's important to keep them clean. Wipe off any formula, stool or urine that may be present after feeding/stimulating. If using a damp cloth or non-alcohol baby wipe please make sure the animal is dry before returning him to his kennel.

Wash your hands with soap before and after handling your foster to prevent the possible spread of infection. Also thoroughly clean and sterilize all supplies used during feeding as well as the immediate area.

Feeding / Medical

Introduction to Solid Food

When your foster reaches 4 weeks of age, you can start to introduce them to solid food and begin the weaning process. This is done by mixing their formula with canned food. The canned food must be pat , anything else will not mix properly and can become a choking hazard. Mix thoroughly until the food becomes an applesauce or gruel type consistency. Offer the mixture in a dish, or off a spoon. By 5-6 weeks old, your foster should be eating solid food regularly.



Food and Stool Issues

Overfeeding - Can lead to serious health complications. A young animal's immature kidneys have a limited capacity and cannot handle excess amounts of fluid. Overloading the digestive system by overfeeding can cause your foster to have diarrhea. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration, which can be fatal in animals this young. Please contact us immediately if you believe that your foster is dehydrated.

Stool Issues - You can tell a lot about your foster animal(s) by the color of their stool. Healthy stool should be firm and pasty yellow/tan in color.

- **Yellow/Green** - Loose, yellow or greenish stool is often a sign of overfeeding. Dial back the amount of formula the animal is eating in each feeding. Check the formula's dilution, the ratio may be off and you will need to adjust accordingly.
- **Gray/White** - Stool that is gray, light gray or white is a sign that the formula is not digesting properly. If this is the case with your foster, please call us immediately.

Potentially Sick Fosters and What to Do

Due to the shelter environment and the fact that underage animals have very fragile immune systems, they are prone to catching colds and other sicknesses. These illnesses range from mild to life-threatening in nature. We will provide treatment for any illnesses that occur.

- **Sneezing or nasal discharge** - Occasional sneezing is quite common in animals. If the sneezing becomes frequent, and is accompanied by goopy eyes, congestion, or a runny nose, please give us a call that day. Also, be sure that they are still eating, as an animal won't eat what he or she can't smell.

Potentially Sick Fosters and What to Do

- Lethargy - Is described as a decrease in activity level. It may be noticed suddenly or over time, in either case it's a sign that your foster needs attention. Healthy animals are normally active when they are awake. Sick animals may have low energy and just want to sit in your lap. If you are unsure if they're lethargic or just being quiet, please contact your veterinarian.
- Weight loss - Underage animals should be constantly growing. If you notice weight loss or if the animal is maintaining the same weight, please contact your veterinarian, even if no other symptoms are present.
- Diarrhea - There are 3 types of stool: normal, soft, and diarrhea. Normal stool is firm and well-shaped. Please note when you first notice soft stool and begin using the monitoring sheets in your Foster Care Packet. If it continues or gets worse, make a medical appointment and bring a fecal sample with you to the appointment. Diarrhea is completely liquid, it may appear that they are excreting plain water or there may be some color to it. Either way, make a medical appointment and take a fecal sample (get what you can) with you. Monitor them closely, as diarrhea can lead to dehydration and become serious rather quickly.
- Vomiting - If an animal vomits soon after eating, they may be eating too much or too fast. But if it happens more than once or they start vomiting liquid or bile, please contact your veterinarian immediately.
- Eye discharge - If discharge is greenish/yellowish and goopy gently wipe away any discharge with a washcloth and warm water. While not an emergency, the animal may need medication so please contact your veterinarian for treatment.
- Fleas & ear mites - Animals 4 weeks and older are eligible to receive flea treatment. For those under 4 weeks of age, daily bedding changes and brushing with the flea comb will reduce and maybe even eliminate the fleas. For animals with ear mites, you'll notice them scratching their ears or shaking their heads. Inside the ear will have a discharge, very similar to coffee grounds. For both instances, please contact your veterinarian for treatment.
- Hair loss - This can be caused by something simple, such as a flea allergy to something more serious like ringworm. please contact your veterinarian at the first sign of any hair loss and if you can, send a picture too.

Fading Kitten Syndrome

The failure to thrive with newborn animals is known as fading animal syndrome. It is a life threatening emergency where a previously healthy animal “crashes” and begins to fade away. Most typically, it is seen in newborns but can occur anywhere from birth to 9 weeks of age. Affected animals will decline quickly and die, so immediate detection and treatment are key to their survival. If any of the below symptoms are noted, please contact your veterinarian immediately.

Symptoms:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Extreme Lethargy | • Low Body Temperature – the kitten feels cool or cold to the touch |
| Gasping for Breath | • Crying Out |

When this happens, it is vital that you take these immediate steps!

Step 1- Get them warm:

- “Burrito” the animal by wrapping them in a towel. Only their face and mouth should be exposed, the rest of their body should be completely wrapped in the towel. It is very important not to take them out of the towel to check on them. Each time they are removed from the towel, even if it’s only for a second, their body temperature will drop.
- Wrap a heating pad, set to low, around the towel to act as an extra heat source. Never place the animal directly onto the heating pad as they can be easily burned.



Step 2- Get their blood sugar up only after they are warm (Never feed a chilled animal):

- If you have Karo syrup on hand then use a syringe to give them three to five drops (three for kittens and five for puppies) every three minutes. If you do not have Karo syrup, then you’ll need to create a simple sugar solution.
 - Get a bowl or Tupperware and a few tablespoons sugar in hot water.
 - Stir it up so you get a sugar water solution - as strong as possible while still pretty runny.
 - Use a syringe to feed them 3–5 drops every 3 minutes. If they aren’t swallowing do not force it, instead try rubbing some onto their tongue or gums. If the animal is unable to swallow do not force liquids down it’s throat as it can get into the lungs and cause asphyxiation.
- **It is important that they are getting the solution every 3 minutes so set a timer or use the stop watch function on your cell phone.**

Step 3 - Call your local emergency veterinary hospital immediately.

- Keep the animal with you and continue to feed the Karo syrup /sugar solution every 3 minutes.

General Criteria for Emergencies

If your foster animal appears abnormally lethargic, begins to have very labored breathing, begins vomiting uncontrollably, becomes severely dehydrated or escapes after 5pm, please call the foster emergency cell phone. In general, most other symptoms can wait until after 8am before calling us – but if you are not sure whether your foster animal's symptoms are life threatening, please err on the side of caution and contact your veterinarian.

Emergency situations

- Continuous weight loss
- Continuous diarrhea
- Continuous vomiting
- Bleeding of any kind—nose, urine, stool
- Any trauma—hit by a car, dropped, limp, stepped on, unconscious
- Difficulty in breathing/blocked airway
- Lethargy
- Dehydration

Non – Emergencies

- If the animal has vomited or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, it can probably wait until the next day to receive help. However, if the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, it is wise to seek emergency help at this time.
- Coughing or sneezing should pose no immediate problems unless accompanied by blood or symptoms such as lethargy or dehydration.

What to do if it's an emergency...

- **Contact your veterinarian or local emergency animal hospital.**

Conclusion

Foster Parent to Foster Parent

At one point in time, every foster family that preceded you was once in your exact same position that you find yourself in now. So we asked them if they had any words of wisdom to share with you. Below are a few gems that may help you in navigating the world of neonatal animals.

Keeping them warm

- Until I bought the microwave “heating disk” my life was so stressful. You warm it up for a few minutes, place it in their carrier/kennel and they’re snug as a bug in a rug for the next 6-8 hours.
- When bottle feeding your foster animal, wrap them up like a little burrito. Leaving only their head exposed. This will help them retain their body heat which helps with digestion.
- Baby socks make an awesome beanie for your foster. Not only does it help keep them warm but it’s also pretty stylish.



Bottle feeding

- One thing I have learned is to write down the ounces that each kitten eats, per feeding. Every ounce counts! In doing so I will be more aware of how much everyone is eating and will be more aware of anyone who consistently consumes a small amount of food.
- If your kitten is a little slow to catch on to eating from the bottle, try stroking it with a toothbrush. This helps simulate their mother’s grooming process and adds
- 1 or 2 weeks may have a little bit of trouble adjusting to the bottle. This is simply a matter of persistence. You must keep offering the bottle and they will learn that this is where food comes from - not mom. I imagine it must be a bit of a shock. I hold them close to me so they get warmth while nursing, a poor substitute but usually I'm all they have. Don't give up on them. Keep offering the bottle. They may go as much as 24 hours with very little nutritional input.

Foster Care Department

- If you'd like more information regarding our Foster Program or have questions regarding bottle feeding neonates, please contact us at: foster@eastbayspca.org





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