



HUMANE SOCIETY

RICHLAND COUNTY

3025 PARK AVENUE WEST • ONTARIO, OH 44906 • WWW.ADOPTOURSTRAYS.COM

Feline Foster Care Information

We are glad that you are providing a foster home for the animals of the Humane Society of Richland County! We want to provide you with information to assist in fostering, rescuing, and socializing kittens. We appreciate your dedication and your assistance with the stray cat population here in Richland County- you are making a difference!

By fostering any of our animals, we do not expect you to adopt from that foster, although if you decide that you do want to adopt, you have first pick from the foster.

Please understand that we do NOT have a veterinarian on staff so we cannot guarantee any of our cats or kittens' health- cats and kittens may harbor viral or bacterial infections that are unknown to our staff. If one of your foster felines become ill (that you are fostering for The Humane Society of Richland County), we have a few options that are available to you.

We do have access to mild antibiotics that we are willing for you to take to treat the illness the kitten or cat may have as well as medicated eye ointment and or drops in cause of an eye infection. The second option is that you may take the foster kitten/cat to a vet to seek more care however, it will be at your own expense.

We typically like to wait until a kitten/litter is approximately 8 weeks old before they are brought back to the shelter. By this point, the kittens have fully developed immune systems and are more easily able to fight off any illness they may be exposed to at the shelter. Once they are old enough, we appreciate you checking with our staff before bringing them back in to guarantee that we do in fact have the space for your fosters.

Lastly, we do not provide food, litter, bedding, bowls, cages, or any other care items since we have a limited supply here at the shelter. Fostering is free, but we ask you to provide the essentials for your foster felines.

The following information is provided:

- **Health Concerns**
- **Determining a Kittens Age**
- **What To Do If You Find a Pregnant Cat or Litter of Kittens With No Mother**
 - **How to Socialize a Feral Kitten to Become Adoptable**

Health Concerns

1. **Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)** - This is one of the most common illnesses that can be found at any shelter due to its extremely contagious nature. It is very easily passed from one kitten to another due to sharing of bowls, food, litter boxes, bedding, and even through the air. Symptoms include sneezing, congestion, and coughing, runny eyes, clear to colored nasal discharge, drooling, lack of appetite, lethargy, and possibly depression. It is very important not to leave any kitten untreated because it can (if it worsens) lead to pneumonia or have other serious complications such as blindness or chronic breathing difficulties. The infection typically lasts for 7-21 days depending on the particular illness. During that time, the infected cat or kitten will be contagious to other cats- make sure to clean and sanitize all supplies with hot soapy bleach water to prevent further spreading.

TREATMENT:

The Humane Society of Richland County may be able to provide you with a mild antibiotic and or eye treatment if needed. Although viral infections do not respond to antibacterial drugs, broad spectrum antibacterial drugs may help in an effort to prevent secondary bacterial infections from complicating the illness, particularly in kittens.

Most cats with an uncomplicated URI can be treated symptomatically at home. Cats and kittens with nasal or airway congestion may benefit from increased environmental humidification, such as being taken into a steamy bathroom for 10-15 minutes several times a day. To minimize irritation from discharges, it is often helpful to wipe away any snot or mucus away from the cat or kitten's face or eyes with a moist tissue or towel. Since cats with URI will have a decreased sense of smell, they often have a decreased appetite- try feeding a highly fragrant wet food (typically we use pate) mixed with some warm water to help improve their appetite.

If a cat or kitten becomes dehydrated (check by scuffing the neck and releasing- if the skin stays in place longer than normal, the cat is dehydrated), depressed, or has a severe case of illness, you may need to seek vet care. At this point the cat or kitten needs attention beyond what the Humane Society of Richland County can give.

2. **Ear Mites** – These are extremely common among kittens that are found outdoors though it still contagious to any other cat. The most common symptom or sign is black/brown discharge that looks very similar to coffee grounds and the cat or kitten will show discomfort by “digging” or scratching at their ears. They may have sores and inflammation in or around the ears due to scratching which can become infected if left untreated.

TREATMENT:

The Humane Society of Richland County may be able to provide medicated drops to dispense into each ear canal. If we are unable to provide treatment, drops can be purchased at any veterinarian office or pet supplies store. You can clean out their ears with wetting down a Q-tip and gently wiping out the “dirt”.

3. **Fleas** – One of the more obvious issues that are common among cats and kittens but if left untreated can be troublesome for young kittens. Due to their small size, tiny kittens can become infested with fleas and become anemic due to blood loss- fleas can also carry other diseases.

TREATMENT:

First pick off fleas with a flea comb (usually very inexpensive at a pet supplies store) and then kittens can be bathed in warm water to get rid of fleas. You can use a small amount of Dawn (the blue) dish soap which kills live fleas. Avoid the eye area. DO NOT USE flea shampoo or any topical flea treatment on kittens that are 8 weeks or younger. It is important to dry off kittens as thoroughly as possible since they can be chilled easily. Offer a warm towel or place on heating pad until completely dry.

4. **Parasites/Worms/Diarrhea** - Any drastic changes in stool consistency in cats or kittens can mean that they are infested with parasites or worms- causing diarrhea, strange looking stool, and or dehydration. Sometimes diarrhea can also be caused simply by stress- being separated from a mother or siblings, moving to a new environment, meeting new people, or a change in diet are also contributors. Cats have very sensitive systems period.

TREATMENT:

Kittens can begin a deworming treatment schedule as young as 10 days old. The Humane Society of Richland County may be able to provide a mild dewormer if needed that is administered by mouth every 10 days for a three step treatment.

Determining a Kittens Age

- **Newborn**- (3-8oz) Eyes are shut, ears are folded down, and kittens are unable to walk- they can purr and make tiny noises. Their umbilical cord usually is still visible.
- **1-2 Weeks**- (8-11oz) Eyes start to open (they are always blue) and focus. Ears begin to open and movement is improved to crawling, snuggling, and kneading. From birth up to 3 weeks, the kittens are FULLY dependent on their mother.
 - NOTE: Caring for kittens at this stage without a nursing mother will require hours each day for feeding and care.
- **3 Weeks**- (7.5-14.5oz) Eyes fully are open now and they are starting to stand up. The kitten will start to respond to noises and movement. The first wobbly steps are taken and baby teeth start to come in.
- **4-5 Weeks**- (8-17oz) Running, playing, digging, and pouncing are starting to occur. Kittens will start to wean and will be able to lap up formula, eat soft (wet) food, and use the litter box by themselves.
- **8 Weeks**- (2lbs) Kittens eyes have changed from blue to the color they will be as an adult. They are little versions of what they will look like fully grown now. As soon as kittens weigh 2lbs or more, they can be safely spayed or neutered through a procedure known as "early-age spay/neuter".
 - NOTE: Cats can become pregnant as early as 16 weeks!!

What to Do If You Find a Pregnant Cat or Litter of Kittens with No Mother

It is always a hard decision to make when finding a litter of kittens or a pregnant mother cat- should you take them in and take on the responsibility or leave them be and hope for the best?

Stray cats and feral cats can be dangerous, carry disease, have fleas, and could potentially cost you money out of your own pocket. If you do find yourself in this situation, we advise that you take all precautions and become knowledgeable on how much time and effort it does take to help these animals.

- Taking In/Taking Care of a Pregnant Mother Cat:
 - When a pregnant mother cat reaches her 3rd trimester (only 42 days into pregnancy and has a visibly swollen belly) she needs to have a higher calorie diet to help her stay nourished and give her a little extra strength to deliver her babies
 - Start giving kitten food rather than adult
 - Offer wet food at least once a day
 - Set up a nest for her to deliver her babies in- giving her a sense of security. It is very important she is not in a stressful environment (which is why The Humane Society of Richland County seeks out foster homes for pregnant surrendered mother cats).
 - Use a cardboard box with soft bedding
 - Put her in a quiet place like a small bathroom or mudroom
 - Don't use anything with a strong odor (bedding or litter fresheners) since the mother and kittens recognize each other by smell.
 - She should be able to have easy access to fresh water, a little bit of food at a time, and a litter box.
 - Use clay, non-clumping litter
 - Watch for any abnormal signs or symptoms
 - Bloody, green, or yellow discharge are signs of complications- the cat will need to be taken to a vet.
 - Sneezing, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, or lack of appetite are signs or sickness- The Humane Society of Richland County may be

able to provide you with a mild antibiotic if you are fostering one of our cats.

- Know the signs of labor
 - Restlessness (looking for a good place to have her babies- the cardboard box or nest you have provided will probably be her pick)
 - Grooming excessively
 - Panting and panting
 - Purring and crying loudly
 - Ceasing to eat
 - Dry heaving
- During delivery
 - Ensure that the mother removes the amniotic sac and cleans each kitten. The mother will usually remove the membrane by licking the kitten- the kitten will be moving and breathing within seconds of the sac being broken.
 - DO NOT CUT THE UMBILICAL CORD or cut any cord that may be hanging out of the mother. This could result in a kitten or mother dying. Most mothers will chew it off themselves.
 - Make sure that the kittens are able to nurse as soon as possible. Some mothers may wait until all of the kittens are born before allowing them to suckle. The early milk contains valuable colostrum with antibodies for the kittens.
 - Keep in mind that all kittens are born both blind and deaf, so they will be seeking out the mother's nipples by smell and touch- sometimes they do so right away and sometimes they may wait several minutes while they recover from birth.
 - DON'T be alarmed if one of the kittens is stillborn (dead). This is very common. Make sure that it is actually deceased before disposing of the kitten.
- After delivery
 - It is very important that the mother is encouraged to eat to keep up her energy and to pass on nutrients to the nursing litter.
 - Offer her wet food
 - Keep food and water close to her nest for the first few days- she may wait a day or so to muster up energy to get up.

- Taking In/Taking Care of a Litter of Kittens with No Mother
 - When finding a litter of kittens with no mother present (especially when they are younger than 8 weeks old) the best thing to do is not handle the kittens unless the mother deceased or if you know for sure that she is not returning. Use gloves if you are going to move or relocate.
 - You can place in a warm box that if mother were to return, she could easily remove them from the box to relocate.
 - Be sure to at least keep them warm if there is no sign of a mom cat. Kittens can actually die from chilling within a short timeframe. They cannot control their own body temperature until they are at least 3 weeks old.
 - Never try to bottle feed a kitten if they are chilled- this can cause death.
 - If you decide to take in the litter and care for them yourself, here are a few tips and guidelines for feeding and well-being of small kittens:
 - Never feed kittens cow milk—this causes diarrhea and can dehydrate the kittens. Feed ONLY kitten formula such as KMR, which can be purchased at most pet supply stores and even places like Wal-Mart. Use kitten bottles to feed as they are designed specifically with a kitten in mind.
 - IF you find yourself in an emergency and you find a kitten and have no access to kitten formula, you may use this for a short time in place of kitten formula:
 - 8oz can evaporated milk
 - 1 beaten egg yolk
 - 2 TB Karo Syrup
 - Mix all ingredients well and strain- warm before serving. Keep excess refrigerated.
 - For kittens 10 days old or younger, feeding should occur every 2 hours around the clock.
 - From 11 days old until 2 ½ weeks, feeding should occur every 3-4 hours.
 - From 2 ½ weeks until 4 weeks old, feeding should occur every 5-6 hours.
 - For kittens 4 weeks and older, feeding should occur 2-3 times daily- they can also start to eat a wet food (pate) and formula mixture.
 - Kittens normally will stop nursing when they become full.

- Weaning occurs around when kittens are 4-5 weeks old- after this time, you can start to offer them wet food (pate) and dry kitten food.
- After feeding, as long as kittens are eating formula, YOU MUST burp them- Kitten formula is sticky, so be sure to clean kittens after feeding with a damp warm washcloth.
- Kittens MUST be stimulated to go to the bathroom after each feeding when they are 4 weeks or younger. Usually a mother cat would lick her kittens- you can simulate her by using a warm, moist cotton ball to gently rub the kittens' anal area to stimulate urination and defecation.
- Start litter training at 4 weeks- use NON-CLUMPLING litter in a shallow and small litter pan.

How to Socialize a Feral Kitten to Become Adoptable

Feral Cats are not socialized to people- and cannot be adopted. With some time and attention, however, you can work with young feral kittens to help them become affectionate and loving companions. It's surely not an overnight transformation; socializing kittens is a big commitment- but it's also very rewarding. If you decide to take in kittens that need socialized (usually its safe between 5-8 weeks old) always use every precaution you can when handling. Kittens that are 2-4 months old can be socialized, but the process may take more time. Cat bites are very dangerous if they are deep enough and become infected. Here are some tips about caring for feral kittens.

- Keep kittens in a room that can be closed off, such as a spare bedroom or bathroom. This will give you easy access and won't give them an opportunity to hide in a hard-to-reach spot. This small space will also calm them and allow the kitten or kittens to easily find their food, water, and litter box.
- Use a proper cage to confine the kittens. If they are very small, use a cage with bars small enough so they will not be able to escape. The cage should be big enough to hold a den or bed, water bowl and food bowl, and a small litter box.
- Provide a safe zone or "den", such as a small box with blankets in the kittens' cage to provide them with a sense of security. It is very important for them to feel relaxed.

- Make sure that the room is “kitten-proofed” so that if they get out of your hands or cage that they will be safe. You don't want them to be able to crawl into furniture, vents, or anywhere that may be difficult for you to catch them.
- Give kittens a 2 day adjustment period after trapping them before interacting with them too much.
- Cats normally feel safer when they are above ground level. Use an old table to raise them off the ground when they are in the cage to provide them with even more security.
- Remember to move slowly and quietly around the kittens- be patient! Spitting, hissing, and hiding are all expressions of fear- do not mistake these signs for aggression. Don't try and rush the socialization process 😊
- Kittens will respond to positive experiences.
- If a litter of kittens are slow to socialize, consider separating them. Isolating the kittens forces them to rely on people- if you cannot isolate each one, make sure to spend time with them individually.
- Offer dry food throughout the day and when socializing with them offer wet food- Food is a key to socialization!
- Pet and handle the kittens for the first time while they are eating so that they have incentive to stay put.
- Devote at least 2 hours per day for a successful socialization.
- Hold the kittens as much as possible- hold them close to your body so they are able to feel your warmth and heartbeat. This will provide them with a sense of security and help build trust.
- As long as they are healthy, try introducing them to an older socialized cat. Monitor the socialization, but this can help the process too!
- Introduce the kittens to as many people (once they are a little more confident) to adjust them to strangers and unexpected circumstances.
- REMEMBER- feral kittens- even though small in size- can hurt you. Wear protective gloves/clothes if necessary. Sometimes you have to scruff kittens by the back of their neck to regain control- use your entire hand and gently but firmly grasp the fur on the back of the neck without pinching, pull the cat up, and immediately support its hind legs.