

# Humane Society of West Michigan Foster Program

## Kitten Manual



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## **Setting Up**

When you bring a foster kitten (or kittens) home, you'll need to start them out in their own small space, separate from other animals. If you give them too much space too quickly, this can overwhelm them and hinder their progress. Please do not give access to the whole house right away, even if they are insisting on coming out. A spare bedroom or bathroom will be best for them while they adjust to their foster home! Offer plenty of hiding spots, toys, and soft bedding. Remove any hazards such as cords, objects that can be knocked over, plants, garbage cans, etc.

## **Bringing Your Foster(s) Home**

Moving to a new home can cause stress to even the most social of kittens. Go slowly on the first few days they are with you and allow them to explore at their own pace.

Your foster kitten is going to need decompression time in your house before doing anything else. Their area should be set up by the time they come home with you and get let out of their carrier. If they don't want to come out right away, let them stay in their carrier until they are ready. Keep in mind that your foster kitten may take time to warm up, especially if they are coming to your home due to being shy or undersocialized. Allow them to interact on their own terms, and when they are ready.

## **Daily Care**

### **Feeding**

Your foster kitten needs fresh food provided daily, both wet and dry (unless instructed otherwise). Please only feed the appropriate diet that was given to you. In general, dietary guidelines are:

- ¼ cup of dry food for breakfast and dinner, and
- ½ of a 5-ounce wet food can or 1 whole can of a 3-ounce wet food can

You will likely find that kittens eat more canned food than dry food, which is okay! You can increase their wet food intake if they aren't eating much dry food.

If you have an underweight kitten, you may need to increase their calorie intake. If you think your kitten is putting on too much weight, please don't restrict their diet. Continue to follow the feeding guidelines above, and reach out to us if you have questions.

### **Cleaning**

A kitten's litter box should be scooped at least once a day. This may need to be done more often if you have multiple kittens. Kittens prefer a clean box that is as far away from their food and water as possible. Make sure they have access to the litter box at all times.

Some kittens will make messes. They might spill food, kick litter around, etc. Please make sure their environment is clean and comfortable every day by washing any soiled bedding, sweeping up litter/food they've kicked around, etc.

## **Monitoring**

When feeding, cleaning, and interacting with your foster kitten(s), monitor for signs of illness, decreased appetite, behavior changes, general attitude, etc. Felines are excellent at hiding pain and discomfort, so please email us right away if you notice anything out of the ordinary.

## **Weight Monitoring**

All kittens must be weighed at least once daily until they are 2 months of age. If they are older, they can be weighed every other day or every third day, to ensure they are still growing properly. Kittens should always be gaining weight. If they ever plateau in weight for more than 24 hours, or begin to lose weight, email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) right away. Weight stall or weight loss is almost always a sign of illness in kittens.

## **Playtime and Enrichment**

Playtime and enrichment are important for kittens, especially while they are quarantined for the first couple weeks. Enrichment is any activity that provides stimulation to the brain and allows for species-typical behavior (scratching, using their nose, etc).

Playtime is a great way to enrich a kitten's daily life, and providing two play sessions a day is generally adequate (waving a wand toy around, throwing toy mice/balls for them to chase, etc). However, some kittens may not have a desire to play and may need enrichment in other ways. Interaction with other animals, with humans, or with new food puzzles/toys is a great way to enrich a kitten's life who may not be as playful as other kittens! You can also try new scratching posts/boards, brushing them, turning on "cat TV" for them to watch, etc.!

# **Socialization**

The prime socialization window for kittens is between 2-12 weeks of age. If possible, they should be socialized to other cats, dogs, adults, and humans during this period! This is the perfect time to handle them, let them learn how to play with others and with us, and make every new experience a positive one. Keep in mind that if you have a shy kitten, you'll have to go slow and not overwhelm them – this can hinder socialization progress! For socializing a shy kitten, please read the socialization tips below.

1. **Start Small:** Too much space can be overwhelming for kittens, so it's important to set them up in one small room to start. A bathroom may be best for harder socialization cases, but if you need to use a bedroom, you can try blocking off the areas under beds/chairs/etc. Hiding spots are necessary for kittens to have, but you also need to be able to interact with them. Cardboard boxes on their side make for great kitten hiding spots, and allow you to still interact with them! Allow your foster kitten to approach you and watch their body language before you proceed with more interaction.
2. **Be Patient:** It may be hard to resist petting your foster kitten, but if they are not ready, please refrain from doing so. "Flooding" kittens with too much interaction too soon can cause their socialization progress to regress. Once your kitten is ready and has had time to adjust to their new space, you can start introducing socialization methods below.

3. **Using Food:** Offering high-value foods to your foster kitten is a great way to help with socialization if your foster cat is not ready to be touched yet! You can sit with them and offer treats or wet food from a distance if they are interested. Avoid staring, reaching toward them, and fast movements. If they don't want to eat in your presence, they may not be ready for this step yet. Instead, try talking to them or reading aloud to them so they get used to having you in their room and recognize that you are not a threat. Talk softly, and you can also try tossing them treats while you are speaking.
4. **Play Therapy:** Instead of forcing your foster kitten out of hiding, try getting as close as they're comfortable with and dangling a wand toy from side to side or in front of them! Even if they just want to watch it move for the first few sessions, that's okay! Aim for three play sessions daily that last a few minutes each. Make sure to follow interactive play sessions with a high-value treat so that they associate them with something positive! You can try turkey or chicken flavored baby food, lickable treats, or tuna. After they're comfortable eating in your presence, you can try to offer it to them on a spoon or from your finger after each play session. Make sure you do not fling wand toys directly at the kitten – this can scare them!
5. **Introducing Touch:** You can start introducing touch while your foster kitten is comfortable eating in your presence. Rather than reaching over their head, sneak your hand up behind them and pet gently along their back. If they draw back, stop petting but continue feeding so the interaction ends on a positive note. Try again next time! You can also introduce touch during play therapy. If your kitten engages with the toy, you can start using it to slowly pet the kitten's cheeks from a safe distance. Once the kitten learns that being petted by the toy feels good and they start leaning into it, slowly offer your closed hand. Once they investigate your closed hand, extend your index finger and allow them to sniff it. If they growl or hiss, they need more time. If they appear relaxed, go ahead and pet them slowly on the cheeks and chin.
6. **Picking up/Holding:** Some kittens don't like to be picked up or held and never will, no matter how much we work with them or how old they are. If they don't want to be picked up, don't push it! Please email us if you would like to work with them on being picked up and held.
7. **Socializing with Others:** The more friends and family who can help socialize, the better! If it's only you doing the socializing, the kitten will warm up to you but may regress in new environments or around new people. When introducing a new person, have them start from square one like you did – don't let them go right to petting unless the kitten approaches them first! Please ask the Foster Coordinator about introducing them to other cats and dogs for additional socialization or if you need help on how to go about socializing with others. Reminder: only introduce new people once they are settled and comfortable.

# Scratching

Scratching is part of a kitten's nature, and their nails are part of their wellbeing! HSWM never recommends declawing, as it is a painful procedure and often causes health/behavioral issues. Kittens play with their nails, regulate their mental wellbeing through their claws, and mark their environment through pheromones on their paws. They need to be able to scratch!

Kittens should have multiple scratching options of different textures/sizes whenever possible. Without this, they may start to scratch things that you don't want them to scratch. If they are scratching inappropriate surfaces, do not punish them. This damages their bond with you and only makes them scared. Instead, gently redirect them to appropriate scratching surfaces and praise them for using them. Using catnip or feliway spray on scratching surfaces can also help them learn what's appropriate to scratch.

If gentle redirection is not working, please email HSWM's Foster staff for guidance on next steps.

# Inappropriate Litter Box Usage

More often than not, inappropriate litter box usage (going outside the box, etc.) is a medical issue that is causing the kitten to associate the litter box with pain. If you notice your foster kitten not using the litter box, email HSWM's Foster staff right away. Once medical issues are ruled out, this becomes a behavioral issue. Below are some possible issues, along with their solutions. **Always email us to rule out medical causes first!**

Issue	Possible Solution
Litter boxes are too dirty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replace the whole box</li><li>• Replace the litter</li><li>• Scoop more than once a day</li></ul>
Too many cats and not enough boxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add more litter boxes (rule of thumb is 1 per cat + 1 extra)</li></ul>
Litter texture/smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a fine grain litter</li><li>• Use unscented litter</li></ul>
Location of the litter box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Change where the litter box is placed</li></ul>
Type of litter box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try a new litter box (uncovered vs. covered, high-sided vs. low-sided, etc).</li></ul>

*\*\*\*If you think your kitten is not using your litter box due to household stress (conflict with other animals in the home, kids in the house, loud household, etc.), please email the Foster Coordinator as it may be best to find another foster home.\*\*\**

# Surgery Scheduling

All animals in HSWM's care are altered prior to adoption. If your animal is unaltered prior to going to foster with you, they will be scheduled for surgery. HSWM's Foster staff schedules an animal's surgery 1-2 weeks after they go to a foster home. Fosters are responsible for checking the surgery schedule to see when their foster animal's surgery date is. **To find your foster animal's surgery date:**

1. Visit HSWM's website and click on the Foster tab.
2. Click Foster Resources, then Appointment Scheduling.
3. Scroll down to the "Surgery" section, then click on the link that says "Surgery Schedule."
4. Request viewing access if this is your first time viewing the foster surgery schedule. Once you have access, find your name on the spreadsheet, and you will see your foster animal's surgery date.
5. Make sure to email **fostermedical@hswestmi.org** and let them know if you can or cannot make the surgery date. If you are unable to make the date, a new one will be offered.

*Once surgery is confirmed, please review the dropoff instructions below. Please note that these instructions are also listed below the foster surgery schedule spreadsheet on our website.*

# Surgery Instructions

***\*\*All puppies/kittens stay at HSWM after surgery to be adopted, unless otherwise discussed with Foster staff.\*\****

*\*\*Please remember: If you want to adopt your foster animal or have an adopter for your foster animal, you need to let our Adoptions team know at least 24 hours prior to surgery!*

*\*\*If you are running late, please email Foster staff **and** [vetstaff@hswestmi.org](mailto:vetstaff@hswestmi.org) with your anticipated arrival time.*

**For kittens and puppies:** You do not need to withhold food or water before surgery.

## **Dropoff**

1. Arrive between 7:30-8am at our **Admitting** doors unless a different time was discussed with Foster staff. Please ring the doorbell labeled "Pre-Op" when you arrive. One of our Vet Techs will meet you to take your animal(s).
2. If your foster is not returning home with you after surgery, please bring back your supplies and place them in the Foster Dropoff shed outside of the Foster Program doors. Please don't place them in the pickup shed!
3. Please be patient. There may be other animals being dropped off at the same time.

## **Pickup**

1. If you are picking up your foster after surgery, arrive between 4-4:30pm at the Admitting Doors, unless a different pickup time was previously discussed. Please ring the doorbell labeled "Pre-Op" and one of our Vet Techs will bring your animal(s) to you.
2. A member of our Vet staff will go over postoperative pain medications. Post-op medication is given by mouth once daily, starting the day after surgery. **This must be administered as prescribed.**
3. Please be patient, as there may be several animals being picked up at the same time.

#### **Additional Surgery Notes:**

- If something comes up that complicates your ability to make the surgery date or dropoff/pickup time, please email HSWM's Foster staff ASAP to discuss rescheduling.
- It is important to keep your animals as mellow and relaxed as possible (especially females) after surgery to avoid post-surgical complications.

*Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions/concerns in regards to surgery or post-surgery!*

## **Post Operative Instructions for Foster Kittens**

Most kittens will self-limit their activity following their surgery. Some may also be groggy for the rest of the day due to anesthesia/pain medication. You will be sent home with oral pain medication to start the day after surgery.

**Monitor appetite:** Some kittens will have little to no appetite following surgery. Some may vomit as well. If either of these symptoms persist past 24 hours, please let us know.

**Keep the incision dry:** No bathing or swimming should be done for 10 days.

**Monitor the incision:** Watch for pain, heat, redness, drainage, or excessive swelling for 7-10 days. If any of these symptoms are observed, please email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org).

**Discourage licking at the incision site:** If your foster is licking or chewing at the incision, they must be fitted with an E-collar (aka "cone"). This should remain in place at all times when they are not being directly supervised until the incision is completely healed. We can provide a collar. For smaller animals, a paper plate can be crafted into a cone. You can email us for instructions.

**Discourage activity:** For 5-7 days (for females), try to discourage running, jumping, or strenuous activity. For males, 3-5 days is adequate. Increased activity may cause post-op complications and delayed healing. Keep your foster pet confined to an area that limits activity.

**Do not give your kitten Aspirin, Tylenol, Advil, or any other over the counter pain medication:** These substances are very toxic to kittens and can be fatal, especially when combined with the pain medication sent home with you. If your foster pet is in excessive pain, please let us know and we can prescribe additional pain relievers.



## **Common Non-Emergency Medical Concerns**

We may not need to do anything right away, but we need to be made aware of the following medical issues when they occur. Please email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) if any of these things are observed within the respective time frame given.

	<b>Neonate Puppies and Kittens</b>	<b>Puppies and Kittens under 5 months</b>	<b>Adult cats and dogs</b>
<b>URI Symptoms - sneezing, congestion, discharge</b>	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours of showing symptoms	After 48 hours of showing symptoms
<b>Conjunctivitis/Eye swelling/redness</b>	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours	After 24 hours
<b>Vomiting</b>	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours	After 48 hours, or 24 hours if frequent
<b>Diarrhea - soft to liquid consistency</b>	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours - As soon as it's observed if there is blood	After 48 hours - after 24 hours if blood is continually present
<b>Constipation - zero stool output</b>	After 24 hours	After 24 hours	After 48 hours
<b>Decreased Appetite</b>	As soon as it's observed	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours of decreased appetite OR after 12 hours for <b>zero</b> food intake
<b>Weight loss or weight plateau (primarily kittens)</b>	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours	After 72 hours

**The following items are less common non-emergency medical concerns:**

- Frequent trips to the litter box, straining to urinate, difficulty eliminating
- Itchy skin or ears
- Blood in stool
- Frequent and excessive water intake
- Decreased activity (not lethargy)

If any of these are noted, please contact [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) .

# **Crashing Kitten Protocol**

A crashing kitten, aka Fading Kitten Syndrome, is a life-threatening emergency. A kitten that was previously seemingly healthy may “crash” and begin to fade away. Immediate intervention must happen to give a crashing kitten a chance at survival.

## **Symptoms**

- Low body temperature (kitten feels cold/cool to the touch)
- Sudden/extreme lethargy (not getting up, unable to stand, not responding to touch)
- Gasping for breath (or meowing/crying out)
- Pale gums and/or tongue
- Seizures
- Other behavior changes like circling, head pressing (pressing their forehead against surfaces), acting agitated/confused

## **Causes:**

- Hypothermia (being too cold)
- Hypoglycemia (blood sugar is too low)

**These can happen suddenly. To give the kitten its best chance at survival, it is important to follow the guidelines below.**

## **Step 1: Get them warm**

1. Immediately wrap the kitten up in a warm towel or blanket, leaving only their face exposed (like a burrito). Their entire body should be in the towel with only the nose and mouth out of it. As tempting as it is, do not take the kitten out of the towel to adjust them, check on them, etc. They can get cold again within seconds.
2. Get a warming device
  - a. Warmie: Microwave until warm, but not scalding. This is the best option, but use what's readily available and make sure a warmie cover or blanket is in between the kitten and the warmie.
  - b. Rice sock: Microwave until warm, but not scalding. Keep in mind these can cool quickly. Make sure there is a blanket between the rice sock and the kitten.
  - c. Bottled water: fill bottles with warm, but not scalding, water. Make sure there is a blanket between the water bottle and the kitten.
  - d. Heating pad: Make sure it stays on and is not scalding. Make sure there is a blanket between the heating pad and the kitten.
3. Place the warming device in a carrier.
4. Place the kitten in the carrier on the warming device. Unwrap them enough to place them closer to the warming device, then rewrap the kitten AND the device, trying to leave only their face exposed.

- a. Never leave an unresponsive or lethargic kitten unsupervised while on a warming device. They cannot move away from the device if it starts to scald them.
5. Cover most of the carrier with a blanket or towel to prevent any cold drafts from passing through. You can leave a small spot uncovered in order to watch them.
6. Check their temperature frequently. Be careful not to let out heat while doing so. Readjust the kitten to warm all parts of the body, especially if unresponsive.

**Warming device notes:**

- If you are using rice socks or water bottles, shake the items to distribute the heat evenly.
- If you are using yourself or a warm towel/blanket while another device is being warmed up, this is temporary. Once the warming device is ready, use that instead of yourself/warm towel or blanket.
- Rubbing the kitten can stimulate their body to make blood start flowing and also help warm them up while you wait for the warming device.

Step 2: Get their blood sugar up

1. Get one of the following items:
  - a. Karo syrup
  - b. Sugar water
    - i. Get a bowl or tupperware container and put a few tablespoons of sugar in hot water. Stir it until the sugar dissolves. You want the mixture to be thick, but still runny.
2. Use an oral syringe, Q-tip, or your finger to put a small amount of karo syrup or sugar water on their gum line every 3 minutes until completely responsive. If they are unresponsive and/or not swallowing, take extra precaution to not get it into their throat
3. Set a timer to make sure that you are giving them karo syrup or sugar water at least every 3 minutes. Every 5 to 10 minutes is too long, and they will continue to crash.

Step 3: Notify the Foster team

1. [Submit a JotForm here](#) per the emergency guidelines in our General Policy Manual. Let us know that you've started crashing kitten protocol for your foster.
2. If during open hours (Monday-Friday, 7am-5:30pm), bring the kitten into us directly. Our admitting doors and foster doors have doorbells that staff will hear. If during closed hours, bring them to the ER listed in your emergency guidelines in the General Policy Manual.

It can take hours for kittens in this condition to improve and stay stable. You should continue to monitor them very closely after they are returned to your care, especially if we don't know the cause of the crash, as it is not uncommon for them to begin crashing again.

**Keep in mind that even with all of the love, attention, and treatment, some kittens still will not make it. Please do not blame yourself during this difficult time. Any foster kitten that you have cared for was given a second chance at life because of YOU.**

## **Feline Panleukopenia, aka “Panleuk”**

### **What is Panleuk?**

Feline Panleukopenia is an extremely hardy virus that is very contagious to unvaccinated or freshly vaccinated cats and kittens. Without early intervention it can be devastating. It is hard to kill, lives a long time in the environment, and is easily spread. Thankfully, this virus cannot go between species and affects only felines.

### **What are the symptoms of Panleuk?**

If kittens stop eating or become less interested in eating, that is typically the first sign of Panleuk. Other symptoms include decreased activity/lethargy, diarrhea (with or without blood), and vomiting. Sometimes symptoms are glaringly obvious, but sometimes they are more subtle. Panleuk is more common in kittens, but it can affect adult cats.

### **Situational examples of symptoms:**

1. **Attitude/Activity change:** They can go from running around your house to just meandering around, or simply just not running around as excitedly.
2. **Appetite loss:** They scarf down a bowl of food that morning or the night prior but their next meal they only eat half the bowl, if at all.
3. **Stool change:** Stool is even becoming softer and darker in texture, or they seem to be uncomfortable while going to the bathroom. Or, their stool suddenly becomes diarrhea with an odd, sweeter smell to it.

***It's important to monitor your kitten's daily health, note any changes, and report them as soon as they are noticed.***

### **Can Panleuk spread to the cats in your home?**

If your cats get their yearly distemper vaccine on time, which protects them from Panleukopenia, and have a good track record of their vaccines throughout their life, they will likely be fine! Regardless, if you have a kitten who ends up contracting Panleuk, everything the kitten may have touched should be cleaned appropriately. Email us for a step-by-step guide to cleaning surfaces that have been touched by a kitten with Panleuk.

If your own pet is not vaccinated, or is coming up on being due for vaccines, please email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) and we can further discuss what to do to help your pets stay safe and how we can assist with that. If your animal were to test positive for Panleuk, you must seek treatment with your primary veterinarian, as we will not be able to provide treatment.

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

It is extremely important to report any symptoms of Panleuk you see in your fosters. We want to intervene as soon as possible! The sooner we are able to intervene, the better the outcome

for all of the cats involved. We would rather check your foster pet and have it turn out to be nothing serious, versus holding off and seeing them when it is too late.

## **Diarrhea in Shelter Animals**

Diarrhea is one of the most common issues we see at the shelter. It can be uncomfortable for the animals, and possibly for you, but we have the resources to help resolve it! It can be caused by stress, parasites, or dietary changes.

### **Preventing diarrhea**

All animals receive dewormers on intake to help prevent diarrhea. Make sure to keep your foster animal on the food they were sent home with to avoid stomach upset. If they do not enjoy the food sent home with them, we can provide new food. Make sure to do a slow transition from old to new food over 7 days. Mix a small amount of the new food into their old food, and slowly increase the amount of new food until they are fully switched over on the 7th day.

### **My foster kitten has diarrhea, what should I do?**

Let us know! For kittens, let us know within 24 hours if they have diarrhea. If there is blood present, let us know immediately. If you notice severe diarrhea with significant blood, please follow the emergency protocol in our General Policy Manual!

### **I have been asked to bring a stool sample in. How do I do that?**

We only need about a spoonful of fecal matter to run tests. You can ask us for a fecal sample tube, or you can put it in a dog poop bag, sandwich bag, or another container you don't mind parting with. Litter in the sample is okay! The sample needs to be less than 24 hours old. Please write the date and name of the foster animal on the container. Samples can be dropped off in our foster dropoff shed, in the basket labeled "Sample basket." Please email us before arriving so that we know you will be dropping off a sample.

### **What is the treatment for diarrhea?**

We may prescribe a probiotic and bland diet for a few days. After screening the fecal sample (if provided), we will send home appropriate medications home based on what we find, or we will ask you to bring your animal in for further treatment.

### **What do parasites look like? Do all parasites cause diarrhea?**

There are many parasites that can cause diarrhea, but not all are visible to the naked eye. The most common parasites you can see at a glance are roundworms (which resemble a spaghetti noodle) and tapeworms (which resemble a grain of rice).

### **Can the parasites be passed on to me? What about my animals?**

It is extremely rare for parasites to be passed onto people, and there is minimal risk of this happening! Certain parasites can be passed on to other animals. Most diarrhea due to parasites will show up during the 10 day quarantine period your foster animal will go through,

so there is minimal risk of your personal animals contracting parasites. If your personal animal becomes infected and starts having diarrhea, you will need to go to your primary veterinarian for care and treatment.

## **Upper Respiratory Infections in Shelter Animals**

### **What is Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)?**

URI is a common illness in shelter animals that can affect many different species, most commonly felines. It targets the upper airways and is similar to the common cold. In most cases, a round of medication will address the illness. In more severe cases, your foster animal may need additional treatment. URI is commonly passed through saliva or nasal discharge via direct contact. It can also be passed indirectly, through sneezing, eating from the same bowls, etc.

### **What are the symptoms of URI?**

The most common symptoms of URI are frequent sneezing and/or coughing, nasal congestion, and nasal discharge. Conjunctivitis (inflammation/redness of the eyelids) can also occur. Depending on the severity of the URI, they may have more severe symptoms like loss of appetite, decreased activity levels, nausea, etc.

### **My foster animal is showing signs of URI. What should I do?**

The occasional sneeze here and there is perfectly normal and not cause for concern. If you notice persistent or worsening symptoms, please notify us within 24 hours for kittens. In order to avoid the added stress of coming back to the shelter, we may ask you to send us a video of their sneezing/breathing, or a picture of the eyes if there are ocular symptoms.

### **How is URI treated?**

We prescribe an oral antibiotic that is given once daily for 10 days. If your kitten also has conjunctivitis along with their URI, we prescribe an eye medication that is put on the affected eye(s) every 12 hours for 7 days. If they are still sneezing and congested after their oral meds are finished, we may do another round of medication. If their nose is raw or plugged, a warm/wet washcloth can be used to gently wipe their nose and help them breathe better. You can also take them into a steamy bathroom to help clear up their sinuses.

### **How can I give the oral medication?**

See the "How to Administer Medications" section for more help. You can also email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) if you are still struggling with administering the medication.

### **Can my own animals contract URI from my foster animal?**

It is possible for kittens to transfer the virus to other cats. When animals are kept separate for the quarantine period, it lessens the chance of URI passing to them. If your animals are up-to-date on vaccines, it decreases their chances of getting sick as well. As long as your animals are kept separate during quarantine and you wash your hands after interacting with a kitten with URI, the risk of your personal animals getting sick is minimal. If your personal animals get sick, you will need to go to your primary veterinarian for treatment.

**Can I catch the illness?**

No! It cannot be passed onto humans or other species.

## **Conjunctivitis in Shelter Animals**

**What is conjunctivitis?**

Conjunctivitis is inflammation of the lining of the animals' eye(s). It commonly occurs along with upper respiratory infections, but can occur by itself as well. It is most common in cats.

**What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?**

Redness/irritation of the eye(s), squinting, watery eye(s), swelling of the eye(s), clear or colored ocular discharge (yellow/green/cloudy), cloudy eye(s), and raising of the third eyelid.

**What should I do if my kitten has symptoms of conjunctivitis?**

Let us know! Email a picture to [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) to help us evaluate if it is conjunctivitis or a different issue. Providing details of the symptoms you're seeing will be helpful as well. If you are unsure if you are also seeing URI symptoms, please refer to the above "Upper Respiratory Infections in Shelter Animals" section.

**How is conjunctivitis treated?**

Conjunctivitis is treated with an ointment that is applied to the affected eye(s) at least every 12 hours for 7 days. If the eye clears up before the instructed time, it is important to continue to give the medication. If symptoms persist after treatment, please email us.

**How do I apply the eye medication?**

Please see the "How to Administer Medication" section for help. You can also email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) if you need further assistance with administering medication.

## **Ear Mites vs. Ear Infections**

**What are ear mites?**

Ear mites are tiny mites that live in the ear canals of animals. Ear mite debris appears dry and dirty, similar to coffee grounds. Ear mites are confirmed via microscopic examination.

**What are symptoms of ear mites?**

Dirty ears and itchy ears! This is usually accompanied by the animal shaking their head/ears, redness on the ear flap, and intense scratching of the ears.

**How are ear mites treated?**

All kittens receive Revolution upon intake, which prevents and treats ear mites. Occasionally, some kittens may need additional treatment.

**What's the difference between mites and an ear infection?**

An ear infection is the result of an overgrowth of bacteria in the ear. Similar to ear mites, ear infections can cause itching, redness, and shaking of the head. The main difference is that ear

infections present with a varying consistency of colored ear debris (light yellow to dark brown, rather than coffee ground color from ear mites), but it is usually softer than ear mite debris.

### **How are ear mites/ear infections diagnosed?**

You will be asked to bring your foster in for an exam, or bring in a sample swab of their ear debris. We will look at the sample under a microscope and determine if they have mites or an infection. They will be prescribed ear medication for one or both ears.

### **How do I get an ear swab sample?**

The easiest way to get a sample is to use a Q-tip. It is best to get a sample right before you plan to drop it off to prevent it from drying out. Be gentle while acquiring the sample and don't be too forceful with the Q-tip in the ear. Animals have an extra turn in their ear, so it is harder to hit their eardrum, but you can still hit it if you apply too much force.

1. Gently hold their ear flap in your fingers and bend it towards the center of their head to open their ear for easier access. Locate the ear canal.
2. Take one Q-tip and insert into the ear canal. Move the Q-tip around against the walls of the ear canal to pick up any debris inside the ear. Repeat for the other ear, using the new Q-tip.
3. Take the Q-tip used to acquire the **LEFT** ear sample and bend it into an L. This will help us distinguish between the left and right ear samples, in case there are different medications needed for each ear.
4. Put the Q-tips in a sealed bag and bring them in as directed by Foster staff.

### **How are ear mites/ear infections treated?**

If your foster animal has an ear infection, they will be prescribed ear ointment or drops. Most commonly, these are given for 7-10 days, depending on the severity of the infection. Approximately two weeks after the medication is started, another ear sample will need to be collected and brought in to make sure the infection is gone. If ear mites are found, we will also send home the appropriate medication. If you are comfortable cleaning your foster animal's ears, you will be provided ear cleaning supplies if necessary. This process is similar to obtaining a sample (above) with the addition of medicated solution applied in the ears.

## **How to Administer Medications**

In general, and particularly for cats, it's best to have two people helping administer medications. However, you may be by yourself and will need to medicate your foster animal on your own.

- Always read the label of your medication for: method to administer, amount to administer, how often to administer, and for how long
- Never give medication to your foster animal, at any time, that has not been prescribed by HSWM's Foster staff or Veterinary staff.
- Please do not stop or wean medications without discussing with Foster staff first.

### **Liquid medications**

When giving a kitten any medication, it is best to have their butt against something (your lap, another object, etc.) so they can't back away. Some kittens will let you place your hand on the side of their face to administer medications. With others, you may need to hold their head gently to administer the medication.



### **Step-by-step guide for liquid medications**

1. Gently place your hand on the top of their head with your fingers under their cheekbones, tilting the head upward slightly.
2. Wiggle the syringe into the side of their mouth. Most times, they will open their mouths on their own.
3. Push the end of the syringe to administer the medication into their mouth. Be careful not to shoot it directly into their throat.

### **Alternative method for liquid medications (for kittens who are not tolerant of medication administration):**

If you are confident that your kitten will eat all of their medication in food (if they are a “good eater”), you can mix the medication into a small amount of wet food or a high-value treat like tuna, baby food, or chicken broth. If they do not eat the medication in their food, you will need to administer it directly. You can use a towel to put the kitten in a “purrito” with just their head poking out, so that they cannot run away or scratch.

*Tip: If administering the medication directly, you can suck up some tuna juice, baby food, or chicken broth into the syringe to make it taste better for your foster kitten. You can pull the end of the syringe back and forth a few times to mix it into the syringe.*

### **Pill and capsule medications**

Hiding pills for kittens can be tricky, because they tend to eat around the pills. You can try hiding the pills in the following: a small meatball of wet food, pill pockets, deli turkey/ham/chicken, canned tuna/chicken, baby food, cheese spray, kong spray. IF they eat around the pills, you can crush the pills and hide them again. **Please ask for approval for this method, as some medications cannot be crushed!** We recommend direct pilling as a last resort, since it can be very stressful to kittens. Please ask for a pill pusher if you must pill directly. You can use a towel to put the kitten in a “purrito” with just their head poking out, so that they cannot run away or scratch.

### **Step-by-step guide for pilling a kitten:**

1. Put the pill/capsule in the tip of the pill pusher.
2. Gently place your hand on top of their head with your fingers by their cheekbones.
3. Lift their head up slightly and wiggle the pill pusher into the side of their mouth. Most kittens will open their mouths on their own.
4. Push the pill pusher all the way to the back of the mouth, as far as the kitten will allow.
5. Push the end of the pill pusher to shoot the pill down the kitten’s throat.
6. If unsure if they swallowed the pill, close and hold their mouth shut gently. Watch for swallowing. If the kitten spits the pill out, repeat the process until they swallow it.

### **Eye drops and ointment**

Having your foster kitten’s butt against something like yourself or another object will make ear drops/ointment easier to apply. The goal is to get the medication into the ear canal, not just on the surface of the ear flap. You can use a towel to put the kitten in a “purrito” with just their head poking out, so that they cannot run away or scratch.

### Step-by-step guide for ear drops/ointment

1. Gently hold their ear flap in your fingers and bend it toward the center of their head to open their ear up for easier access.
2. Locate the ear canal (toward the base of the ear).
3. Take your medication and take the tip into the ear canal. Squeeze the bottle to administer the medication.
4. Massage the base of the ear. Repeat for the other ear, if necessary.

*Tip: The label will tell you how many drops to administer into each ear canal. Prior to administering, you can practice without your foster pet by squeezing the bottle onto a cloth to see how much pressure you need to apply to administer the correct amount.*

### Additional tips and tricks:

As mentioned above, you can put your kitten into a cozy “purrito” if they like to wiggle, scratch, or run away!



### Step-by-step guide for the cozy purrito:

1. Place your kitten on a towel or blanket.
2. Take one side of the towel and wrap it around the top of their body, leaving their head exposed.
3. Pull the corner of the towel (the portion in your hand) the rest of the way around the kitten to wrap it around their chest. It can be tucked under the chin and secured on the side of their head with your hand.
4. Take the other side of the towel and fold it up and over their body. If you have enough length, wrap it around their chest like you did with the first wrap.
5. Now they are cozy and snuggly in a towel and ready to be medicated, and you don't need to be worried about their nails getting you!
6. Make it positive! Always give them treats after getting their medication.

In general, be patient! It can be frustrating to medicate an animal. If you have to take a break and come back to it later, that's okay. We want to make the experience as positive as possible

for the animal – and for you! If you are having difficulty after trying these suggestions, please email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) for more help and alternatives.

## **Adoption Process: From Foster to Forever Home**

If your animal is healthy, behaviorally assessed, and at least 2 months of age, they can become available for adoption even if they are still waiting on a medical procedure. This can happen within a few days of bringing them home!

### **Building an Adoption Profile**

We rely on our fosters to provide photos of their foster animals that will help them to become adopted! Please send as many photos as possible, and make sure there is good lighting and that your kitten looks comfortable and happy. Feel free to showcase their personality – if they are goofy, feel free to send photos of them playing or making silly faces! If they are a cuddle bug, you can send pictures of them snuggling with you.

\*\*\*To send videos of your foster animal to be uploaded to their adoption profile, you can submit them here: <https://tinyurl.com/HSWMFosterUpload>

Writing a bio for your foster kitten can make a huge difference in adoption interest. Please feel free to write your own bio, or just email us to tell us all about what makes your foster animal special and what you love about them! If the content is sweet, funny, or relatable – even better! When your foster animal does something positive that affects you emotionally, make a note of it so we can share that with potential adopters.

### **The Adoption Process from Home**

Once animals are cleared to be adopted, potential adopters can view them on our website! This is why it is so important that they have a great adoption profile! Once someone applies to adopt your foster animal and their application is approved, our Adoptions Department will reach out to both you and the potential adopter to schedule a meet-and-greet. This can be done at HSWM, over a video call (Zoom, Google Meets, etc.), or wherever you are comfortable. As the foster, you know more about your foster animal than anyone, so feel free to answer questions and tell the potential adopter(s) everything you've learned about them!

If the potential adopters decide to go through with the adoption, please email our Adoptions department so they can coordinate a transfer of care meeting. Transfer of care meetings should happen at HSWM's facility, unless otherwise approved by an HSWM staff member. On the day of the transfer of care meeting, you will show up at the designated time and place with your foster animal. You can either help facilitate the transfer and meet the adopter, or you can drop off the animal to our adoptions team and they can handle it from there! If all your foster animals have been adopted, make sure you return your supplies to our foster dropoff shed by the foster doors. Please feel free to send any favorite toys, blankets, or beds home with the adopters!

