

**HUMANE SOCIETY**   
OF WEST MICHIGAN  
**Foster Program**

**Kitten Manual**

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# Preparing for your Foster Kitten

## **Setting up Space to Foster**

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, cause them to panic, and hinder their socialization 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, scratchers, and soft bedding. Remove any hazards such as cords, objects that can be knocked over, plants, and garbage cans.

## **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 of their carrier right away, that's okay! Let them stay in their carrier until they are ready to check out the space outside of it. You can help create a hiding spot with the carrier by leaving the door open and covering it with a blanket or towel, then leaving the room. 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 under socialized. 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 kitten wet and dry (unless instructed otherwise). Please only feed the appropriate diet that was given to you. In general, dietary guidelines across two meals are:

- ¼ cup of dry food per kitten
- ½ of a 5 oz wet food can or 1 whole can of 3oz wet food can per kitten

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. Additionally, your kitten may need smaller meals more frequently, especially if they are younger – doing multiple, smaller meals throughout the day is actually encouraged if you're able!

If you have an underweight kitten, you may need to increase their calorie intake, which may be directed by the Foster Vet Tech. If you need to slowly reintroduce food as they are emaciated, you will be given a feeding plan that will need to be strictly followed. 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.

## Cleaning

A kitten's litter box needs to be scooped at least once a day. This may need to be, and usually is, 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. Depending on your space and number of kittens, you may need to offer more than one litterbox. This is encouraged to do if your space allows.

Some kittens will make messes. They might spill food, kick litter around, have accidents outside the box, etc. Please make sure their environment is clean and comfortable every day by checking and washing any soiled bedding, sweeping up litter/food they've kicked around, changing litterboxes covered in fecal matter, etc.

## Monitoring

When feeding, cleaning, and interacting with your foster kitten, monitor for signs of illness like decreased appetite, behavior changes, and output changes. Felines are excellent at hiding pain and discomfort, so please email us right away if you notice anything out of the ordinary. Doing physical once overs to look for things like hair loss, scabbing, swelling, and lesions once a day should also be done if the kitten allows it.

## 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, unless they go to foster knowingly sick. If they are sick or start to become ill, this will need to be done every day. Kittens should **ALWAYS** be gaining good amounts of weight. If they ever plateau in weight for more than 24 hours, growing slowly, or begin to lose weight, email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) right away. **There is no such thing as a healthy, slow growing kitten.** Weight stall or weight loss is almost always a sign of illness in kittens and sometimes can be the first and or only sign of something wrong.

## Playtime and Enrichment

Playtime and enrichment are important for kittens, especially when they are quarantined for the first couple of weeks. Enrichment is an activity that provides stimulation to the brain and allows for species-typical behavior to be expressed. These include but are not limited to scratching, hunting and pouncing, and foraging.

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.). Felines typically like shorter, more frequent play sessions. Interaction with other animals, with humans, or with new food puzzles/toys is a great way to enrich a kitten's life! You can also try new things like scratching posts/boards, brushing them, and turning on "cat TV" for them to watch!

# Behavior

## Scratching

Scratching is part of a kitten's nature, and their nails are part of their wellbeing! HSWM does not condone declawing, as it is a painful, medically unnecessary procedure and often causes health and 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 (like cardboard, sisal rope, and carpet), sizes, and angles (slanted, horizontal, or vertical) whenever possible. The item needs to be secured to a wall or have a stable base, so it can't be knocked over if they are throwing their entire body at it during play! 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. They don't understand what you're doing or why. This damages their bond with you, only making them scared of you. Instead, gently redirect them away and preferably to appropriate scratching surfaces. Then praise them when they use it, or reward otherwise with something they enjoy like pets, treats, or toys. Using catnip on scratching surfaces can also help them learn what is appropriate to scratch by enticing them to it.

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

## Inappropriate Litter Box usage

More often than not, inappropriate litter box usage (going outside the litterbox) is a medical issue that is causing the kitten to associate the litter box with pain, especially if they've used the box well up until now. If you notice your foster kitten not using the litterbox, email HSWM's Foster Vet Tech right away. Once medical

issues are ruled out, this becomes a behavioral issue. Below are some possible issues, along with their solutions, that you can try while emailing us. **Always email us to rule out medical causes!**

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)</li> <li>• Try a bigger litter box</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, ect.), please email the Foster Coordinator as it may be best to find another foster home for them to stay in with less stressors.*

## Body language

Cats talk to us through body language. They can express different things like relaxation or annoyance by their eyes, their ear position, their body positioning, their tail – their whole body! Knowing how to read their body to figure out what they're telling us is incredibly helpful. It can help us decide if they're in pain, if they're scared, if we can push boundaries, or if we need to back off and stop what we are doing. Please see the next two pages about different things we may see when they're relaxed and completely comfortable, all the way to being self-protective.



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Chirrup and Chatters offers education lectures, workshops, and behavior consulting to shelters, veterinary hospitals, and animal organizations

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR CAT'S BODY LANGUAGE

Your cat is communicating with you all the time. It's important for you to listen. They use their body to show you when they're feeling calm and relaxed, and when they're feeling stressed out and anxious. Try to avoid labels like "fractious or grumpy" and instead describe the behavior and body language you are seeing. Labels don't describe behavior, can't be tested, gives a false understanding of the problem, increases the use of ineffective training and not addressing the function of the behavior, provides excuses for people to get rid of their animals, and more.



### THE GREEN ZONE

When your cat is in this zone, they're feeling calm and secure. They're likely resting or exploring an environment they feel comfortable in.



#### SLEEPING / RESTING

**EYES:** Closed to open  
**HEAD:** On surface or over body  
**TAIL:** Extended or loosely wrapped  
**EARS:** Normal or forward  
**SOUNDS:** None or purr



#### RESTING

**EYES:** Open, relaxed  
**BODY:** Lying on belly or sitting  
**HEAD:** On surface or over body  
**TAIL:** Extended or loosely wrapped  
**EARS:** Normal or forward  
**SOUNDS:** None or purr



#### PERKED AND INTERESTED

**EYES:** Looking directly but not intensely  
**BODY:** Back is horizontal  
**HEAD:** Head slightly down  
**TAIL:** Closer to body, may flicker slightly  
**EARS:** Perked forward  
**EYES:** Pupils slightly dilated



#### EXPLORING

**EYES:** Open, staring but not intensely  
**BODY:** Back is horizontal  
**HEAD:** Over body  
**TAIL:** Up and winding or loosely down  
**EARS:** Normal or perked  
**SOUNDS:** None or "meow"



## THE CAUTION ZONE

When your cat is in this zone, they're feeling moderately anxious and stressed. While in this zone, they're alert and likely uncomfortable in their current environment. When your cat is in this zone, consider whether you can remove or redirect them.



### AROUSSED / MILDLY ANXIOUS

**EYES:** Wide open, avoiding eye contact  
**BODY:** Shifted away  
**HEAD:** Turns head away  
**TAIL:** Closer to body, may flicker slightly  
**EARS:** To the side  
**EYES:** Pupils slightly dilated



### FRIGHTENED

**EYES:** Fully open, pupils dilated  
**HEAD:** Little or no movement  
**TAIL:** Tucked, hair standing  
**EARS:** To the side  
**BODY:** Flat, tense / tight  
**SOUNDS:** None



### TRYING TO FLEE

**EYES:** Pupils dilated  
**HEAD:** Turned toward stimulus  
**TAIL:** Close to body, hair standing  
**BODY:** Poised to flee, back arched  
**SOUNDS:** None, meow, hissing



## THE RED ZONE

When your cat is in this zone, they're over threshold, they're stressed, terrified and may exhibit offensive or defensive aggressive behavior due to this. It is critical that you remove the trigger and if that isn't possible, remove them (by luring) into a safe, comfortable space to calm.



### FIGHT / TERRIFIED

**EYES:** Fully open, pupils fully dilated  
**HEAD:** Lower than body  
**TAIL:** Tucked, hair standing  
**EARS:** Forward  
**BODY:** Leaning forward, thrashing  
**SOUNDS:** Growling, hissing



### FIGHT / TERRIFIED

**EYES:** Fully open, pupils fully dilated, staring  
**HEAD:** Lower than body  
**TAIL:** Tucked, hair standing  
**EARS:** Forward, back  
**BODY:** Pulled back, arched back  
**SOUNDS:** Growling, hissing

# Socialization

The *prime* socialization window for kittens is between 2-7 weeks of age. They are learning about the world around them and what is dangerous or not. They may startle easily, but as long as it is a neutral or positive experience, they'll recover quickly and learn what made them jump isn't something life threatening. If possible, they should be socialized to other cats, dogs, human adults and human children during this period (to felines, human children are a different species to human adults)! This age is also the perfect time to handle them (touching ears, paws, practicing exams, nail trims), letting them learn how to play appropriately with others and with humans, and what is appropriate behavior. It is very important to make every new experience a positive one. Animals being used to help socialize should be animal-friendly to help create a positive experience. 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.

## **Start small**

Too much space can be overwhelming for kittens, so it's important to set them up in one small room or space to start. A bathroom typically is best for harder socialization cases. Whatever space you use, block places that will make them inaccessible to us like under the bed in a bedroom. However, hiding spots are necessary for kittens to have; you just need to provide hiding spaces we can still interact with them from. Cardboard boxes on their side with the bottom removed and blanket or bed in it 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.

## **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 is exposing them to a stressful stimulus in full force instead of small, gradual increments. Flooding them by doing too much interaction too soon can cause their socialization progress to regress as it causes them to be fearful of us. We also **do NOT** wrap kittens up in blankets and tote them around with us when they're scared of us – this is flooding! It builds better trust between humans and them if they get to go at their pace. Once your kitten is ready and has had time to adjust to their new space, you can start introducing socialization methods below.

## Using Food

Offering high-value foods (baby food without onions or garlic and lick treats are good high-value treats) to your foster kitten is a great way to help with socialization if they aren't 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, leaning over 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 (or just sit in silence!), so they get used to having you in their room. When you are talking, speak softly. You can try tossing them treats while you are sitting with them, even starting with tossing and not looking at them as you do this. You may need to sit across the room from them at first depending on how relaxed they are when you get closer to them.

## Play Therapy

If they aren't food motivated or wanting to eat with you present, play can be another thing to try and create a positive experience. 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. Try to follow interactive play sessions with a high value treat so that they associate them with something else positive. Make sure you do not fling wand toys directly at the kitten – this can scare them!

## Introducing Touch

You can start introducing touch when your foster kitten is relaxed and comfortable in your presence. A good time to try is when they're eating. As long as they are relaxed (ears aren't focused on listening to you while they're eating, tense posture) rather than reaching over their head or towards them from the front, "sneak" your hand up behind them and pet gently along their shoulder area. If they draw back, move away, or stop eating to stare at you with tense body language, stop petting but stay near as they resume eating so the interaction ends on a positive note (the food). If they won't resume eating and continue to be alert towards you, move away slowly from them. Try again next time!

You can also introduce touch during play therapy. If your kitten engages with a wand 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 (which they already have a positive association with the toy) and they start leaning into it, slowly offer your closed hand. If they show body language like stiffening up, whiskers or ears

angling away, shrink or turn away, growl, or hiss, they need more time. Slowly take back your hand. Once they come forward to investigate your offered closed hand, you can slowly try to touch a cheek or forehead with it if they don't rub on it first.

### **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. Doing so when they don't want it can be flooding them. 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, but sometimes it is just not something to be worked on and that's okay.

### **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 in their environment.

# Veterinary and Medical Care

## 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. The Foster Vet Tech schedules the 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 box that says "Surgery Schedule"
4. Find your name on the spreadsheet, and you will see your foster animal's surgery date.
5. Make sure to email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto: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 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 no later than the night prior to surgery! If you notify us after that period, it will be first-come, first-serve, and you will have to come back the following day to adopt when we open.

If you are running late to surgery drop off, please email [fostermedical@hswestmi.org](mailto:fostermedical@hswestmi.org) **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.

### Drop off

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" on the right-hand side of the doors 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 Supply Dropoff 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 4-5pm at the Admitting Doors, unless a different pickup time was previously discussed. If the door is open, you can come inside and let the staff member at the desk know you're there to pick up your foster from surgery. If it is not open or a staff member is not present, 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 as they already received the medication for the day while under for 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 drop off/pick up time, please email the Foster Vet Tech as soon as possible 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 regard to surgery or recovery!

## **Post Operative Instructions for 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 drugs. 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 persists past 12 hours, please let us know right away.

**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 are noted, please let us know.

**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 on this.

**Discourage activity:** For 5-7 days (for females), try to discourage running, jumping, or strenuous activity as much as possible. 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 if not sooner.

	Neonate Puppies and Kittens	Puppies and Kittens under 5 months	Adult cats and dogs
URI symptoms – sneezing, congestion, discharge	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours of showing symptoms	After 48 hours of showing symptoms
Conjunctivitis, eye swelling, redness, discharge	As soon as it's observed.	After 24 hours	After 24 hours
Vomiting	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours	After 48 hours, or 24 hours if frequent
Diarrhea – soft to liquid consistency	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours – as soon as it's observed if there is blood or it's very liquid	After 48 hours – after 24 hours if blood is continually present
Constipation – zero stool output	After 24 hours	After 24 hours	After 48 hours
Decreased Appetite	As soon as it's observed	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours of decreased appetite OR after 12 hours for zero food intake
Weight loss or weight plateau (primarily kittens)	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 (urgent to emergency if male cat)
- Itchy skin or ears
- Blood or worms in stool
- Frequent and excessive water intake
- Decreased normal activity/behavior

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

### **What makes a normal kitten?**

Kittens should always be eating well at every meal, with no vomiting. Vomiting and hairballs are NOT normal for felines, no matter their age.

Their stool should be formed, a 2/3 on the Purina Fecal Scoring chart found later in this manual under “Diarrhea for Shelter Animals”. Diarrhea, while common in kittens, is not normal and needs to be addressed. It can quickly dehydrate kittens, which can create precarious to life-threatening situations for them.

They should urinate a few times throughout the day with no straining in the box or frequent trips to the box.

They should be bright, alert, interactive, and playful. Even if they are shy or scared of humans, they should be alert to us and bright and playful with each other. If they start acting quieter, more reclusive, or not doing their normal behaviors, this can be cause for concern.

Their coat should be clean, dry, soft, and groomed. There shouldn't be any lumps, bumps, hair loss, lesions, or crusting.

They should always be gaining good amounts of weight. There is no such thing as a healthy, slow growing kitten.

If your kitten falls away from these “normals”, this is a concern and we need to be alerted with the symptoms you are likely seeing. Sometimes it can just be their demeanor is off, which this alone is still as much of a concern as obvious signs of illness!

# Medical Informational Sheets

## 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 decline rapidly. Immediate intervention must happen to give a crashing kitten a chance at survival. You CAN do something!

### Symptoms can include:

- Low body temperature - kitten feels cold or cool to the touch, temp is lower than normal, typically less than 100 degrees depending on age when taken
- Sudden/extreme lethargy - not getting up, unable to stand, minimal to no response to touch
- Gasping for breath usually accompanied by meowing, crying out, and or pawing at face
- Pale gums and or tongue
- Seizures
- Other behavior changes like circling, head pressing (pressing their forehead against surfaces), acting agitated, acting confused – these behaviors typically indicate low blood sugar

### Causes

- Hypothermia (being too cold)
- Hypoglycemia (blood sugar is too low)
- Underlying illness or congenital deformity

*These can happen suddenly and unexpectedly and is an emergency. To give the kitten the best chance at survival, it is important to familiarize yourself with and follow the guidelines below.*

### Step 1: Get them warm

1. Immediately wrap the kitten up in a towel or blanket, warm, if possible, like a burrito, leaving only their face exposed. Their whole body - tail, ears, and paws included - should be in the towel with only nose and mouth exposed. As tempting as it is, DO NOT take the kitten *fully* out of the towel to adjust them, check on them, etc. Every time you take them out, you risk making them cold again. If you have to adjust them because they are unresponsive and you are trying to avoid burning them, or are checking their temperature, open the blanket or towel as minimally as possible during the process.

2. Get a warming device
  - a. **Warmie Disc:** 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 disc
  - b. **Rice sock:** Microwave until warm but not scalding. Keep in mind these can cool quickly. If hot, make sure to place a blanket between the 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 – low to medium temp works well if they are incased in the heat of it. Make sure there is a blanket between the heating pad and the kitten
3. Place 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, every 15-30 minutes. Be careful not to let heat out while doing so. Readjust the kitten to warm all parts of the body, especially if unresponsive, frequently
7. Be careful not to heat them too quickly. It takes energy to warm the body back up so if they are made to warm up too quickly, they can expend more energy than they have. Warming up to normal temperature, especially if their temperature is very low, can take a few hours.

### Warming notes

- If you are using rice socks or water bottles, shake the items to distribute the heat evenly. These also cool down pretty quickly, so it's important to check them frequently that they're warm enough.
- If you are using yourself or a warm towel/blanket while another device is being warmed up, this is very temporary. Once the warming device is ready, switch to that.

- 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
    - i. Sugar water is preferred as the consistency of Karo syrup can dehydrate them and pose a risk of aspiration if they cannot swallow due to it blocking the airway.
  - 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, cotton swab, or your finger to put a small amount of karo syrup or sugar water on the gumline every 3-5 minutes until responsive. If they are unresponsive and/or not swallowing, take extra precaution to not get it into the mouth and down their throat.

### **Step 3: Notify the Foster team**

1. Submit a JotForm 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-5pm), bring the kitten to us directly. Our Admitting door has a doorbell that can be rung that our vet staff will hear. You can also bring them directly to the Foster office but if there is no one there, find a staff member as soon as possible. If after hours, during the weekend, or during a holiday, bring them to the ER listed on 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's not uncommon for them to begin crashing again. Even if seemingly better, the first 24-48 hours after a crash they are still considered critical.

**Keep in mind that even with all the love, attention, and treatment, some kittens still will not make it. Please do not blame yourself during this difficult time. Any foster kittens that you have cared for were 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 newly 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. 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 common 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 becoming softer and darker in texture, or they seem to be uncomfortable while going to the bathroom. Or, their stool suddenly becomes diarrhea +/- blood

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

If your cat gets their distemper vaccine on schedule as recommended by their vet, 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 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, but it is not normal for the animal. It can be uncomfortable for the animals, and possibly for you, but we have the resources to help resolve it! The three main causes are stress, parasites, or dietary changes.

## **Preventing diarrhea**

All animals receive dewormers on intake to kill off any potential parasites that can cause 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. If able, try to do a slow transition from the old food to the new food to help minimize the risk of diarrhea. 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. If they refuse to eat the old food, even mixed in with the new food, we need them to eat so go ahead and switch them to the new food completely.

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

Let us know! For kittens, let us know within 24 hours if they have soft stool or diarrhea. If there is blood present, or it is severe diarrhea (almost like water!) let us know immediately. This would look like a 7/7 on the Purina Fecal Scoring Chart below.

## **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, and 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 by our Foster Supply Drop-off shed, in the basket labeled "Sample basket". Once a sample is dropped off in the basket, make sure to email the Foster Vet Tech to alert them that the sample was dropped off outside.

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

Treatment varies on severity and diagnostic results. We may start by just prescribing a probiotic and prescription gastrointestinal 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.









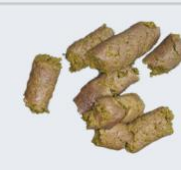










## **What do parasites look like? Do all parasites cause diarrhea?**

There are many parasites that can cause diarrhea, but not all are visible to the naked eye. The most common parasites you can see in the stool 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 rare for parasites to be passed onto people, and there is minimal risk of this happening! Practicing good hygiene with keeping the environment cleaned and sanitized and washing your hands with soap and water are the best way to minimize this risk. Certain parasites can be passed on to other animals more easily. 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.

# PURINA FECAL SCORING CHART

Score	Specimen	Characteristics
<p><i>Too hard!</i></p>  <p>1</p> 		<p>Very hard and dry Often expelled as individual pellets Requires much effort to expel from the body Leaves no surface residue when picked up</p>
<p><i>The best!</i></p>  <p>2</p> 		<p>Firm, but not hard; pliable Segmented appearance Leaves little or no surface residue when picked up</p>
<p><i>Okay too!</i></p>  <p>3</p> 		<p>Log shaped; moist surface Little or no visible segmentation Leaves surface residue, but holds form when picked up</p>
<p>4</p> 		<p>Very moist and soggy Log shaped Leaves surface residue and loses form when picked up</p>
<p><i>Starting to become soft-concerning!</i></p>  <p>5</p> 		<p>Very moist, but has a distinct shape Present in piles rather than logs Leaves surface residue and loses form when picked up</p>
<p>6</p> 		<p>Has texture, but no defined shape Present as piles or spots Leaves surface residue when picked up</p>
<p><i>Urgent to emergency!!!</i></p>  <p>7</p> 		<p>Watery No texture Present in flat puddles</p>

# Upper Respiratory Infections in Shelter Animals

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

URI is a common illness in shelter animals that can affect many different species, most commonly felines, and targets the upper airways. 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, like through sneezing, contaminated surfaces, and eating from the same bowls.

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

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

## **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 first.

## **How is URI treated?**

We most commonly 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) typically 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 steam up a bathroom and sit in there with them for 10-15 minutes to help break up congestion in their nose.

## **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 and have a different change of clothes, 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 among cats.

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

The following can happen to one or both of the eyes: Redness/irritation, squinting, watering, swelling, 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 typically treated with an eye ointment or drop 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.

# 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 the 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. The ear debris is typically a dark brown, dry, coffee ground texture.

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

All kittens receive Revolution upon intake, which treats and prevents 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 or yeast 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 typically present with a varying consistency of colored ear debris (light yellow to dark brown, semi-moist texture), as well as the possibility of a smell, crusting and or discharge if it's a severe infection.

### **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, and it is best to get a sample right before you plan to drop it off to prevent it from drying out, which keeps it from being able to be prepped and read. 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 ears, 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 (pinna) 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 it 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. Gentle pressure may be needed if the ears are painful.
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?**

They will be prescribed ear ointment or drops. Most commonly, these are given for 7-10 days, depending on the severity of the infection. After the medication is done, another ear sample will need to be collected and brought in to make sure the infection is gone. It should be within a week of finishing the medications, the sooner the better. If you are comfortable cleaning your foster animal's ears, you will be provided with ear cleaning supplies if necessary. This process is similar to obtaining a sample (above) with the addition of medicated solution applied in the ears.

# Adoption Process: From Foster to Forever Home

If your animal is healthy, behaviorally assessed as appropriate, 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 clear, well-lit photos as possible, and that your kitten looks comfortable, happy, and in their natural space. Showcase their personality! If they are goofy, send photos of them playing or making silly faces! If they are a cuddle bug, send pictures of them snuggling with you!

Writing a bio for your foster kitten can make a huge difference in adoption interest as well. It is highly encouraged to write up a bio for your foster animal, or you can also 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!

## **The Adoption Process from Home**

Once animals are cleared to be available for adoption, potential adopters can view them on our website! This is why it is so important that they have a great adoption profile complete with photos and a bio! 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 (though rarely with felines), over a video call (Zoom, Google Meets, etc.), or your home if you're comfortable with this. Doing the meet in the home is the best option as the adopter gets to meet them in the environment they're comfortable in, and they can physically interact with them. As the foster, you know your foster's personality best, so tell the potential adopter everything you've learned about them! If you have an animal that is a behavior or medical consult, this will be done first with an appropriate staff member of HSWM before the meet-and-greet is arranged.

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, 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 Supply Drop Off shed. Please feel free to send any favorite toys, blankets, or beds home with the adopters!