

Kitten Care Guide



Phone: (248) 283-5645

Email: lkniffen@michiganhumane.org



Michigan
Humane

OVERVIEW OF CARE ROUTINE



Thank you for fostering! These orphaned kittens have a chance because of you. You will benefit as well, because saving their lives is incredibly rewarding! Your primary contact for the Michigan Humane foster program will be the foster programs supervisor, Laura Kniffen. You can contact her with any questions, concerns or foster appointment needs.

Kittens do best with a consistent care routine, similar to the one below. Different caregivers may rearrange the order that these tasks are performed as long as all aspects are included and done in the same order every time. If you are going to weigh the kittens after feeding, make sure you are doing this every time so weights do not change in relation to feeding. Checking weight before and after feeding helps ensure each kitten is eating enough and not losing weight.



- 1. Weigh**
- 2. Bottle feed**
- 3. Stimulate to go potty**
- 4. Record weight/
feeding amount/potty**
- 5. Ensure heat source is still
warm and return to carrier**

WEIGHT/ FEEDING CHART

It is important to weigh kittens at least once a day (or even at every feeding) to ensure they are gaining weight. For small kittens, a food scale is recommended as small fluctuations in weight are easiest to track in grams.

DATE	WEIGHT	SUGGESTED FEEDING AMOUNT	FREQUENCY OF FEEDING
0-1 weeks	70-150 grams	2-6 mls	2 hours
1-2 weeks	150-250 grams	6-10 mls	2-3 hours
2-3 weeks	250-350 grams	10-14 mls	3-4 hours
3-4 weeks	350-450 grams	14-18 mls	4-5 hours
4-5 weeks	450-550 grams	18-22 mls	5-6 hours
5+ weeks	<550 grams	transition to gruel	6-8 hours

- The above chart is used for guidance, but some kittens may vary. The best indication of how kittens are doing is weight gain. Aim for gaining at least 8 grams a day for each kitten.
- Frequency of feeding is based on average feedings needed per day. It is generally considered safe to extend nighttime feedings about 1 hour past recommended feeding intervals as long as daytime feeding intervals are shortened accordingly.

BOTTLE FEEDING

FORMULA PREP

Only feed unweaned kittens a formula designed specifically for kittens, never cow's milk or the "cat milk" sold in grocery stores. The formula Michigan Humane recommends is KMR (kitten milk replacer) by PetAg.

Mix your formula according to package directions (2 parts water to 1 part KMR). You can mix up to 24 hours of formula at once to be stored in the fridge in a covered container and heated as needed. Mix formula thoroughly so there are no lumps present — lumps can clog the nipple during feeding and result in a lot of frustration for the kitten. Blender bottles are helpful tools for mixing formula.

Remember to date and refrigerate your powdered formula after opening. Opened cans of powdered formula can remain unspoiled for up to three months when refrigerated.

When you are ready to feed, formula can be warmed up by heating in the microwave for short intervals (around 8 seconds). Formula should always be swirled to mix when heating to prevent hot spots. Test the formula on your wrist to ensure it is not too hot or cold before



feeding every kitten. When feeding multiple kittens, extra formula can be kept hot by floating the bottle in hot water in a coffee cup.

BOTTLE FEEDING BASICS

Place your kitten on your lap or table in a natural position with the belly down. Hold the kitten's head steady with your nondominant hand and introduce the bottle with your dominant hand. Kittens that have learned to latch should then be able to pull as much milk as they want from the syringe/bottle. Do not try to force kittens to consume more than they are interested in eating.

It may take kittens that are new to bottle feeding 24-36 hours to learn a good latch. This can be frustrating, so be patient with your kittens. If the kitten is not actively pulling milk, or is just chewing on the nipple, try

slowly drizzling a small amount of milk into the kitten's mouth as they mouth the nipple. It's important not to force too much milk into the kitten's mouth at once so that they do not aspirate/choke.

If you are starting with very young kittens, you may want to start feeding with a syringe and the miracle nipples to better track the quantity consumed and to have better control of the flow. Once bottle feeding is well-established and the kittens are consuming larger quantities, it will become easier to switch to a standard kitten bottle.



AVOIDING ASPIRATION

The biggest risk during feeding is aspiration, which is when a kitten accidentally breathes formula into the lungs. This can result in difficult breathing and pneumonia (although not always). You can help prevent aspiration by always feeding kittens belly down and not forcing milk into the kitten's mouth. If you see your kitten sneezing milk, stop the feeding and help wipe the milk from the kitten's nose. Monitor the kitten for any additional signs of breathing problems and seek veterinary care if problems are noted.



WEANING

Around 4-5 weeks, you can start to introduce kittens to gruel. Gruel is a soupy mixture of canned kitten food and KMR. Try first introducing gruel using a spoon or fingers until kittens appear to be eating the food easily. Until kittens are routinely eating solids, it is important to still supplement bottles after offering gruel for an hour or so. Once the kittens appear to be comfortable eating gruel, a shallow dish can be provided. Weighing kittens daily during weaning is especially important to ensure they are eating enough. Kittens can be especially messy during this

time and may require daily bathing to prevent skin rashes (see bathing section). As kittens become comfortable eating gruel, you may gradually thicken the consistency until they are eating canned food, and then begin to offer dry kitten food (6-8 weeks).

A good mix for gruel is 1 can kitten food (3 oz.) with 1 scoop KMR and 2 scoops water. This can be made thicker or thinner based on your kitten's preference and appetite.

BATHING



Generally, all that is needed to keep young kittens clean is a wipe down after feedings using a tissue or baby wipe to remove excess milk from the face and clean around genitals after stimulation. Occasionally kittens may get dirty and require an actual bath, especially if they have flea dirt remaining after flea treatment (wait 5 days after topical treatments), have developed diarrhea, and especially during weaning.

Make sure that water is comfortably warm but not too hot or cold. Try to only wash kittens from the neck down to avoid getting water

accidentally in the nose, eyes or ears. If the face is especially dirty, try wiping this area down with a wet washcloth instead. We only recommend washing kittens using diluted Dawn dish soap.

Kittens can be extremely prone to developing hypothermia (low body temperature) after a bath, so please dry them very thoroughly and make sure the heat source is warm before placing them back into the enclosure.

POTTY TRAINING



Young kittens (less than 3-5 weeks of age) must be stimulated to pee/poop. In non-orphans, this is usually done by the mother licking the genitals to encourage them to go to the bathroom. You will need to replicate this experience by using a soft absorbent substance like tissue, toilet paper or a cotton ball to gently rub the kitten's genitals in a circular motion until they are finished going. Kittens will typically pee at every feeding, but may only poop once every 24-48 hours.

- Urine should be almost clear colored. Yellow to dark colored urine may indicate dehydration. If a kitten consistently is having yellow to dark colored urine, you should seek veterinary care.
- Poop should be yellow to brown and the consistency of soft serve ice cream to Play-Doh. Diarrhea can cause dehydration quickly in young kittens, so seek veterinary care as soon as symptoms are noted. If a kitten has not pooped in more than 3 days, they are likely getting constipated, so you should also seek veterinary care.

Around 3 weeks, you can start to provide a small plate or shallow tray with some litter in it. Different kittens will learn to use the litter box at their own pace, so it is important to continue to stimulate them at every feeding until they are using the litter box on their own on a regular basis.

HOUSING

Young kittens need a warm, dry and quiet place to sleep between meals. It is often easiest to keep them in a cat carrier with soft blankets and a portable heat source (warming disc, hot water bottle or rice sack) at one end. Check at every feeding to ensure the heat source is still warm and is wrapped in a blanket to prevent burns. Kittens should have enough room to move away from the heat source if they feel too warm.

Fleece baby blankets are the preferred bedding as the loops on towels can snag nails and cut off circulation to limbs if kittens become tangled. Avoid using heating blankets

as they can easily overheat and cause thermal burns to kittens and are also a fire/electrical hazard.

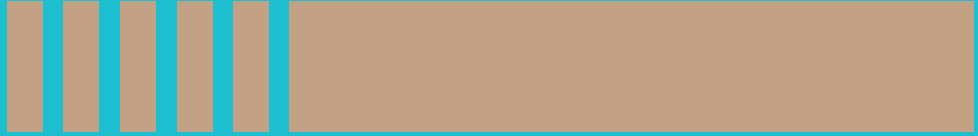
Once kittens are weaned onto soft food and using the litter box on their own, you will need to provide them with a larger enclosure. A dog crate, extra bathroom or playpen are ideal as they are easily cleaned and provide plenty of space for playing, eating and litter. They will no longer need a heat source after 4 weeks and can be kept in normal room temperatures.

QUARANTINE



Michigan Humane recommends keeping all personal animals separate from foster animals so that illnesses are not spread. If you choose to do an introduction, you should abide by a 10-day quarantine period.

HEALTH



Kittens are susceptible to a variety of health problems due to their immature immune systems and young age. Unfortunately, unweaned kittens do have a higher mortality rate than older kittens and cats, and although heartbreaking, it is not uncommon for kittens to pass away. If you do lose a kitten, remember, they would not have had any chance at life if it was not for your efforts.

Due to their vulnerable state, it is important to address any health issues immediately as they arise.

- **Fleas:** Many over-the-counter flea products are not safe for young kittens and can be toxic. A Dawn soap bath can help remove fleas when noted. Veterinary care should also be sought, as fleas can make young kittens anemic quickly.
- **Diarrhea:** Diarrhea is the most common problem for young kittens and can have a variety of causes. It is important to start treating diarrhea as soon as it is noted as small kittens can dehydrate quickly, so please make an appointment as soon as diarrhea is noted. If it is after hours or you cannot be seen right away, it is okay to substitute the water in your formula with unflavored, clear Pedialyte until the kitten is seen by a veterinarian. Pedialyte can be found in the baby care sections of most pharmacies or with children's remedies.
- **Upper Respiratory Infections:** Signs of upper respiratory infections can include sneezing, nasal discharge or crusts around the nose, and eye discharge/conjunctivitis. Most of the time, this can be treated with antibiotics, so please seek veterinary care if these signs are noted.
- **Constipation:** This is also a common problem in formula-fed kittens. If one or all of your kittens have gone longer than 3 days without pooping, please make an appointment with the shelter. It may be beneficial to dilute the concentration of formula from 2:1 to 3:1 until the kitten can be treated at the shelter.

EMERGENCY SIGNS

Please seek veterinary care as soon as possible if any of the signs below are noted:

- **Open mouth breathing/gasping**
- **Abnormal vocalization/crying**
- **Changes to level of consciousness**

SOCIALIZATION

Once the kittens are weaning, it is important to start socializing them. This means play time for their development, touching their feet and toes (to get them comfortable with nail trimmings), and slowly introducing them to new sounds and people. A social, friendly, outgoing kitten will find a forever home much more quickly!



FOSTER APPOINTMENTS

Routine care appointments should be every two weeks, as the kittens will be receiving deworming medications and booster vaccinations. You can call, e-mail or use the Survey Monkey link to request an appointment. Please request appointment two days prior to when you need the appointment, whenever possible.

Foster appointment request link: **www.surveymonkey.com/s/apptrequest**
(Must be an Michigan Humane Foster Caregiver to request appointment).

Your next appointment is on

(date/time)

at

(location)

Additional Notes
