

2021

Stray HELP Foster Manual





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WELCOME

Welcome to Stray HELP's cat fostering program, and thank you for your interest. If you are reading this manual then you are either considering becoming a foster parent to one or more of our adoptable cats, or you have already made the decision to do so. Foster volunteers have played an important role in our organization since its beginning, and they continue to be vital assets by helping to fulfill Stray HELP's mission and vision.

Our Objectives:

- To provide loving, nurturing, temporary homes for cats requiring short-term convalescence or need for one on one socialization.
- To encourage the normal growth and development of very young, otherwise healthy kittens.
- To encourage the recovery and rehabilitation of cats not yet ready for adoption.
- To protect cats and kittens, with underdeveloped or weakened immune systems, from the normal bacteria and viruses they could be exposed to.

When you temporarily care for one or more of these cats in your home, they are afforded a chance for a life off the streets. Street cats are among our most vulnerable population of animals. They are at high risk for injury, violence, illness and suffering.

We want all our foster families to be happy and comfortable with their experience. This manual is designed to be a guide to our foster program and to provide you with a variety of information to help you get started. Also included is information on the care of sick cats, foster kittens & cats and medical information. When it comes time for a foster cat to find a permanent, adoptive home, there is information explaining the adoption phase of fostering.

Feel free to call or email your Foster Care Coordinator with additional questions or concerns. Our goal is to make your foster care experience enjoyable and to provide you with continuous support during the time you are fostering with us.

If you have a friend or family member who is interested in becoming a Foster Care Volunteer, please direct them to your Foster Care Coordinator. Again, thank you for accepting this important responsibility. We truly appreciate your commitment!

Thank you.

STRAYHELP FOSTER CARE CONTACT INFORMATION

Your Foster Care Coordinator is _____.

_____ may be contacted at the following:

Email: _____

Cell: _____

Who to call, text or email, and when:

Checking in... keeping your foster care coordinator up on the latest antics, health reports and social development of your foster is not only fun, but an important part of assuring the continued good health of your foster and preparing them for adoption to a permanent home.

Many of our foster parents enjoy sharing pictures and updates every few days or each week via text and email, particularly those with very young kittens. With cats or kittens who have health issues foster parents may be in touch more frequently with their Foster Care Coordinator for support and to provide updates.

*** For emergencies/authorization of emergency medical treatment, please call directly:
Ann LaGoy at 845-489-5211, OR Kim Marrow at 914-588-5716**

Stray HELP works with veterinarian offices throughout Dutchess County and will find the best office for you to bring your foster animal. Stray HELP will reimburse you for out-of-pocket expenses associated with providing emergency veterinary care to your foster animal, but you must have attempted to notify Ann or Kim and have authorization before medical treatment is initiated.

FOSTER VOLUNTEER JOB SUMMARY

Foster volunteers care for Stray HELP's cats or kittens in their own home under the supervision of their Foster Care Coordinator. The period of foster care depends on the health and condition of the cats or kittens, direct adoptions through our Adoption Program, as well as space at the PetSmart Adoption Center, where Stray HELP has been an adoption partner since 2017. The duration of foster care can range from a few days to a few months.

Responsibilities of the foster care provider will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Providing care and treatment of fosters as instructed by Stray HELP; including administration of simple medications as required.
- Ensuring the safety of all fosters under their care;
- Isolating fosters from household pets (as instructed);
- Reporting any problems to their foster care coordinator;
- Ensuring that all owned pets have up-to-date vaccines and have been altered;
- Familiarization with Stray HELP Foster Program policies;
- Transportation of foster animals to and from the Stray HELP adoption venue as required.

FOSTER FAMILY REQUIREMENTS & DUTIES

The role of a foster parent/family is to provide a nurturing environment in your home for cats so they may mature, heal, socialize, and remain or become adoptable.

Background in cat care is an asset, and familiarity with handling cats is preferred, but not required. Foster volunteers must be able to commit to the entire length of the foster period requested.

Foster Family Requirements:

- At least one person in the household must be twenty-one (21) years of age or older.
- The foster parent needs to complete, sign, and return the Foster Family Application and the Foster Family Agreement. Every foster family must read this manual prior to taking in their first foster animal.
- Foster families shall own their own home, or have their landlord's written permission to allow animals to live on the premises.
- Foster families shall provide a safe, warm, and INDOOR environment, along with appropriate food, water, litter box and litter, bedding and modest play items. Cats and kittens are not to live or be kept outside.
- Personally owned pets must be current on vaccines and spayed or neutered.
- Foster adopters agree to spend time with and give love to the foster animal(s).
- The foster families agree to respond to communications from Stray HELP representatives within twenty-four (24) hours.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Foster Volunteer:

- Feeding, socialization, and light grooming of your foster pet.
- Bringing your foster animal(s) to Stray HELP clinic (or other specified veterinary facility) for medical care including altering (spay/neuter) and vaccinations. If applicable, you will be given a schedule as to when your foster animals(s) are to be altered and when they will receive vaccines. The Foster Program Coordinator will contact you to schedule appointments.
- Bringing the foster pet to PetSmart Adoption Center to meet with approved adopters.
- Keeping a watchful eye on the health of your foster pet.
- Bringing cats to the Stray HELP clinic or other suitable and approved veterinarian if they become ill or injured.
- Provide photos and brief write-ups for the animal for inclusion on the adoption pages of our website, social media and adoption listings.
- Medications - Foster families will be required to administer medications, based on the individual needs of the foster animal. Families will be trained or matched with the appropriate level of care needed for their foster animal.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:



How will I receive my foster assignment?

After you become an approved foster caretaker, the Foster Program Coordinator will contact you when there are animals in need of foster care.

You will get a Foster Cat Fact Sheet which will indicate the name, age and description of the cat(s), the approximate dates for vaccinations and spay/neuter procedure, and if applicable, any medications the foster animal is taking.

How long do foster assignments last?

It depends on the situation. The stay in a foster home can range from a few days to a few months. Nursing or special needs cats will typically require longer stays in foster homes.

How much time does fostering take on a daily basis?

The time commitment can range from an hour or two each day to as much as round the clock care if you are bottle-feeding infants; in these cases several family members with ability to care for the cat(s) is very helpful. Bottle fed kittens may need to be fed every two hours. The Foster Care Coordinator can work with you to determine what type of foster animal is best suited to your family structure, schedule, daily availability and skill level.

What supplies are needed to foster? How much will it cost?

Foster parents provide shelter, food, litter boxes, litter, toys, comfort items and love. Expensive food, litter and toys are not required. If you are financially unable to provide these items, yet still able to provide a safe and loving temporary home, Stray HELP will provide these items for you. ***Stray HELP will provide all veterinary care, medicine and any special food or equipment needed throughout your foster experience at no cost to you.***

Do I need to have prior medical knowledge or expertise?

No prior medical knowledge is required. Stray HELP will train interested foster parents to administer simple medications. We routinely de-worm all cats and kittens and will work with foster family to assure their foster animal(s) get the medication they need.

What if my foster animal becomes sick?

If a foster pet becomes sick, foster parents must contact the Foster Care Coordinator to schedule a visit with the veterinarian. This will most likely take place at a Stray HELP veterinarian. All approved veterinary costs are paid by Stray HELP. Do not bring the cat to your veterinarian or any veterinarian without prior consent from the Foster Care Coordinator.

I have my own animals, can I foster?

Yes, but keep in mind that it's always a health risk when you expose your animal to other animals, even if those animals are healthy. The health risk is minimal if your animals are current on their vaccinations (required to foster with Stray HELP), maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle, and are not elderly or very young.

All dogs belonging to the foster volunteer must have up-to-date DHLPP and rabies at least ten (10) days prior to a foster cat or kitten entering the foster home. All cats belonging to the foster volunteer must have up-to-date FVRCP and rabies vaccines at least ten (10) days prior to a foster cat or kittens entering the foster home. All animals belonging to a foster volunteer must be spayed or neutered. Stray HELP will not allow foster animals to go into a home with unaltered animals.

What if I have children?

Fostering is a wonderful family experience and can build a foundation for philanthropy and volunteerism in your children. It's important to pair a cat(s) that is age-appropriate with your children. You must also be diligent about providing guidance, instructions and rules to your children about caring for your foster cat(s).

Can I adopt my foster animal?

YES! As long as foster parents meet Stray HELP's requirements for adoption, foster parents have first choice to adopt their foster pet. Paperwork is required and our regular adoption fees usually apply. We ask that foster families provide foster care services to us for a four (4) month period prior to adopting.

Adopting your foster pet may influence your ability to continue fostering; Stray HELP asks fosters to take that into consideration. Please realize that foster homes are always in need and when they "fill up," fewer animals can be helped.

How are foster animals promoted so they get adopted?

The photos and stories you provide are posted on our website, social media and pet listing sites. We have adoptable cats and kittens available in the PetSmart Adoption Center when they are ready. We also promote our organization and adoptable pets during adoption events.

Can I return my foster animal to the rescue if I am no longer able to foster?

While we prefer that foster families continue with their foster assignment until we find a permanent home for their foster pet, we understand that situations can change.

If it becomes necessary to discontinue fostering, we request that the foster family provides Stray HELP with as much notice as possible so that we can find an alternative foster family for your cat. Of course, in an emergency a foster parent may always bring their cat back to the rescue right away.

What if I go on vacation or have a business trip?

If given enough notice, we can usually find volunteers that can foster sit for short durations. We ask that foster parents always keep the Foster Program Coordinator apprised of any temporary foster sitting needs.

PREPARING FOR YOUR FOSTER ANIMAL(S)



Before you pick up your foster cat(s), you will want to prepare your home for its stay. If you have other pets in your household, you must provide a separate room for your foster cat for the safety of all animals involved. No matter how friendly your dog or cat may be, you never know how the new foster cat will react to your pets. Also, although our shelter animals are examined by our staff when they arrive, they may be harboring an illness that could be contagious to your own animals. We encourage you to keep your foster animals away from your pets. The room you keep your fostered animals in should be free from valuables that may become damaged.

For the safety of the animals, please take the following steps to prepare your home;

- Remove any potentially toxic items.
- Close toilet bowls.
- Remove and replace exposed electrical cords.
- Remove breakable items that could be knocked off shelves.
- Remove small, ingestible items such as rubber bands or pieces of string.

If you are fostering a nursing mom or a very young litter, you will want to create a nesting box (instructions below). Always provide your fosters with access to fresh water (bottle-feeding infants excepted). Litter pans should be placed away from food and water; if you have kittens under eight (8) weeks of age, do not use clumping litter. Newspaper can be used for litter.

When fostered animals are not being supervised, you may crate them to prevent damage to your home and injury to the pet(s).

Stray HELP will provide any necessary medication and equipment for the cats for the duration of their stay. When you pick up your foster pet, your Foster Care Coordinator will go over the specific needs of each cat, instruct you on how to administer medicine (if needed), give you feeding guidelines and answer any other questions that you may have about each cat. Stray HELP will also provide a vaccine schedule for your foster cat(s) so that you will know when you will need to bring them for their vaccines and altering (if necessary).

NOTE: Foster cats and kittens must be kept inside.



HOUSEHOLD ITEMS THAT ARE POISONOUS TO ANIMALS (including foods and plants)

Please remove any rat or mouse poisons, caustic or ammonia-based cleaners, windshield washer fluid, and automotive anti-freeze from your house before fostering!

In addition to the above listed items, any of the following items can be fatal to your foster cat if ingested:

Alcohol	Chocolate	Lantana
Almonds	Choke Cherry	Lily
Amaryllis bulb	Chrysanthemum	Lily of the Valley
Anthurium	Clematis	Lupine Species
Apricot	Crocus bulb	Macadamia Nuts
Aspirin	Cretan	Marijuana/Hemp
Autumn Crocus	Daffodil	Mistletoe Berries
Avocado	Delphinium, larkspur	Narcissus
Azalea	Dumb Cane	Oleander
Begonia	Elderberry	Onion
Bird of paradise	English Ivy	Peach
Bittersweet	Fig	Pencil Cactus
Bleeding Heart	Four-o'clocks	Philodendron
Boxwood	Fox glove	Poinsettia
Bracken Fern	Garlic	Potato
Buckeye	Grapes	Raisins
Buttercup	Hyacinth Bulbs	Rhododendron
Caffeine	Hydrangea	Rhubarb leaves
Caladium	Holly Berries	Rosary Pea
Calla Lilly	Iris Corms	Schefflera
Castor bean	Jack in the pulpit	Shamrock
Cherry	Jimsonweed	Spurge
	Kalanchoe	Tomatoes



MOMS WITH LITTERS

Stray HELP predominantly works with street cats that are not socialized to, and afraid of, humans. Being confined in a home, as loving as it may be, is a particularly stressful time for a nursing mom who has lived her life outside with little to no direct human contact. Foster family must be aware and respectful of new mom and her needs.

A large dog crate with a large carrier inside it for mom to hide in and nurse her babies will help keep kittens safe and reduce stress of mother. A litter pan should be kept to the side of the carrier, away from babies. Take some time during the day to sit in the room with mom and babies, and let the mother grow accustomed to your presence. Non socialized moms will train their babies very early on to be leery of humans. It is a delicate balance to allow mom her space, but still begin socializing kittens so they become adoptable. Kittens born to street cats should not be handled until they are at least 3 weeks old to help reduce stress on mom and help assure she continues to nurse.

When a stray or friendly mom first comes to your home with her babies, allow her to have some time and space to get used to her surroundings and reduce her stress. A small room with a nesting box (see below) is appropriate for this situation. Do not touch the babies for the first 2-3 days (at least) until the mother is more trusting with you. Have patience. Take some time during the day to sit in the room with mom and babies, and let the mother grow accustomed to your presence.

Food and water should be available for mom at all times.

The room or enclosure where the litter is kept should be baby-proofed. Even kittens with their eyes still shut are very mobile and can easily find themselves in harm's way.

Take care to monitor mom's nursing. If one particular baby is not eating enough, place it right up to mother's nipple; if mom is a feral cat, using a tool such as a ladle may work to reposition the kitten without causing stress to mom. If mom is not doing a good job nursing her infants, please contact the Foster Care Coordinator. Infants can continue to nurse up to 6-8 weeks of age. Instructions on weaning and feeding kittens can be found in the cat supplements.

Give mom opportunities away from her infants by providing a shelf or climber where she can relax if she chooses, but she is still able to keep a watchful eye on her babies. Never remove mom from her babies as she helps provide the warmth they need; let her choose to take a few minutes away.

Always be cautious around moms with their litters as they can become protective of their babies.

Watch for warning signs such as growling or hissing. Un-neutered males must never be around nursing mothers! A nursing mother is most fertile at this time and can easily become pregnant.

THE NESTING BOX ENVIRONMENT (kittens):

A clean, warm, dry, and quiet site should be selected for the mother to care for her young in their first few days and weeks of life. The nesting box is the essential physical environment for a nursing mother because it provides the optimal location for her and the early development of her babies. The sides need to be high enough to prevent the young from wandering, but low enough for the mother to be able to come and go with ease. Cardboard and wooden boxes and plastic pans can be adapted for cats and kittens, but a large carrier with its door open is best. When cleaning the cage, feeding and watering unsocialized mothers, the carrier door can be locked closed, and then reopened when you are done.

The box should be lined with appropriate materials. If you are using a cardboard or wooden box, line the bottom with heavy plastic. Then, several layers of clean newspaper should be laid on the box floor to absorb moisture and odor. Next, clean, dry, soft, non-raveling material should be placed on top of the newspaper (disposable diapers, blankets, mattress pads, etc. make good fillers). Fleece makes an excellent blanket; it “wicks” and urine will be absorbed by the layers underneath the fleece.

The warm filler material should be laundered or replaced when they become soiled. Examine towels or blankets after each washing to ensure they remain free from any holes and trim frayed edges if needed. Having towels or blankets in the nesting box provides good traction so the young ones can crawl around without slipping.

It is important that the area where the infants are kept is clean, warm and smooth, so that the area around the umbilical cord does not become infected. Never place babies in deep, loose bedding (straw, hay or shavings). These might obstruct breathing or be inhaled and cause respiratory infections.

The temperature near the young should be 85-95° F. DO NOT use heating pads. They can become too hot and cause burns. We recommend using microwave snuggle safe heat discs over heating pads.

Drafts or dampness will chill neonates (very young babies) even when room temperature is sufficient. Do not place whelping box housing the young on concrete; this will draw a large amount of heat away from them. Babies are not able to maintain their own body temperature until they are four (4) weeks old.

ORPHANED INFANTS UNDER FOUR (4) WEEKS



Fostering infant kittens is challenging, but extremely rewarding. Orphaned kittens up to four (4) weeks old are completely dependent on their “surrogate mother” for safety, warmth and food. By following the guidelines below, you will be able to nurse your infant into a playful adolescent, right before your very eyes.

Location

Infants should be kept in a quiet, confined space such as a small carrier or nesting box. Always have blankets or towels down and a hot water bottle or microwave snuggle safe heat disc for warmth. Infants need to be kept clean and dry.

Please wash bedding as needed. We encourage the use of a small stuffed animal for the infant to snuggle. Infants should never be outside, except when being transported to and from Stray HELP or Veterinarians.

Warmth

Keeping infants warm and free from drafts is very important because babies under four (4) weeks of age are not able to regulate their body temperature and are incapable of shivering. The safest method for warming infant animals is with a microwave snuggle safe heat disc. You can also use a hot water bottle. In order to prevent overheating or burns, be sure to cover any hot surface with a towel and provide space where babies can move off the heat source if they need to.

As a last resort, an electric heating pad may be used. Heating pads should be placed on the lowest setting and anchored so that the infant cannot crawl underneath. Place the heating pad under half the box or crate so that the infant can escape the heat if needed. **Use extreme caution when warming animals with a heating pad! This should only be used in cases of emergency when a hot water bottle is not available.** Infants should feel warm, not hot or cold to the touch.

Handling

Refer to kitten development in the cat supplements.

Feeding

When feeding infants, always pay close attention to feeding guidelines. Dilute formula carefully according to the directions, and NEVER give cow's milk to any animal. It can cause severe stomach upset. Most cats are lactose intolerant to anything other than mother's milk.

Age appropriate, commercially available dry and wet food should be given. Kittens eat a lot and can be given more food if they seem hungry. Use good hygiene/cleanliness with all food supplies. Once a can of wet food is opened, unused food should be kept refrigerated and discarded after 24 hours. Make all food changes gradually. Sudden changes in an animal's diet can cause diarrhea and stomach upset.

Urination and defecation

Infants 1-2 weeks old need to be stimulated in order to urinate and defecate before and after every feeding. Gently pat its anal area with a cotton ball or soft toilet paper that has been moistened with warm water. Gently massaging the infant's belly also encourages movement; it may take a few minutes and baby may appear fussy – it's new and they don't have developed abdominal muscles yet.

Be sure to keep the anal area clean and dry by sponging with warm water and patting dry with a soft towel. Don't panic if the animal does not defecate every time, but do offer adequate time and massage. Once a day is fine, although they may defecate as frequently as after every meal or as infrequently as every other day. Consistency of stool can vary from quite loose to toothpaste and can range in color from yellow to dark brown. Kittens should urinate at each feeding.

When infants first begin to walk, offer a small litter pan. Kittens as young as 2 weeks may instinctually begin looking for a litter pan. A small plastic bin, like a take-out food container, can be filled with cedar pellets or newspaper and left in the crate for use.

Kittens: Place litter pan in a convenient place where the kitten is familiar. Try to find a quiet area so that the kitten will not be stressed or too distracted. In the general area of the kitten's bedding and food is a good place. Simply place the kitten in the litter pan and pat anal area with a moist cloth. When kitten starts to urinate or defecate, remove the cloth and allow the kitten to use the pan. Instinctively, the kitten should start scratching and burying waste. Repeat these steps until the kitten goes into the litter pan on their own. It usually takes about 1-3 times. **Never rub the kitten's nose in their urine or feces when they relieve themselves in the wrong place. Do not use clumping litter for kittens under 8 weeks of age.**

The following is a breakdown of what you need to know in order to feed infants according to their age:

INFANTS 0-2 WEEKS OLD, special training provided by experienced Stray HELP volunteers:

- Should be fed every 2-4 hours (KMR milk replacement for kittens)
- Mix formula according to directions. Opened cans of formula must be stored in the refrigerator.
- Formula should be fed at room temperature. You can mix the formula with warm water or reheat refrigerated formula by placing the bottle in a pan or mug of warm water. Test the formula on your wrist for correct temperature. **Do not heat the bottle in microwave.** Microwave heating causes nutrient loss in formula and "hot spots" can develop.
- If there is not an opening in the nipple already, make a small hole with a hot needle or a cross cut with small scissors. The nipple opening should be only large enough for a few drops of milk to drip out when the bottle is held upside down and squeezed gently. Milk should NOT stream out. This is important so that the infant does not inhale formula into the lungs and develop pneumonia. **Bubbles of milk coming out of the nose indicate that the animal is aspirating.** In this case an adjustment must be made in the nipple size or the thickness of the formula.
- The best method of feeding is for the infant to lie on its belly as it would when nursing on mom. Lightly grasp the infant around the head with one hand, then place the tip of the nipple to the infant's mouth and squeeze a little milk into the mouth with your other hand. The infant should latch on. Do not hold the infant too far upright or tip the infant's head as this can cause the infant to choke or aspirate.
- The amount of formula the infant should eat depends on its weight. Some infants will want to eat more than is listed on the can. This is okay, but be aware that overeating can cause diarrhea or stomach upset.
- If an infant refuses to eat for two (2) consecutive feedings, call the Foster Care Coordinator. Bottle-fed kittens may run the risk of hypoglycemia (too low blood sugar). The best way to prevent this is to feed them every two to four hours. Hypoglycemic animals are very lethargic and may even be lying on their side immobile. Their body temperature will be low. If you suspect that a foster animal is hypoglycemic, mix Karo syrup or maple syrup with a little warm water, place in the syringe provided to you and gently force-feed 1 - 2 milliliters of the mixture. **Then contact the Foster Care Coordinator immediately.**



INFANTS 3-4 WEEKS OLD:

- Should be fed every 4-6 hours.
- At this stage you can start introducing the infant to soft food: baby food or pate mixed with KMR and soaked kitten kibble. Mix formula and kibble and let stand for 15 minutes to soften the kibble. It will look like gruel. Introducing new food may give infants diarrhea.
- Encourage infant to lap from a shallow dish. Put some of the gruel on your finger, put it in the infant's mouth, then lower your finger to the food dish and encourage infant to lap from the dish. Don't be alarmed if the infant is not interested; it can take a couple of days.
- After infant is eating from a dish, start reducing the amount of formula and increasing the amount of soft food. The goal is to wean the infant off of formula all together. Once weaned, dry food should also be made available. Full details on the weaning process can be found in the cat supplements.



SELF-SUFFICIENT KITTENS

Once kittens are eating on their own, around four to six weeks of age, they can be in a room where they can run and play while supervised. When unsupervised, kittens should be kept in a large crate with bedding, toys, litter pan, food and fresh water.

Make sure their space is completely baby-proofed and damage-proofed. They will want to play and be held and cuddled often. Don't be afraid to have fun! Kittens should continue to be kept inside.

These animals are still too young to be fully vaccinated, so keeping them away from other animals and their waste is key to reducing possible exposure to disease.

RECOVERING ANIMALS

Cats that are recovering from an illness or operation may be placed in a foster home until they are completely recovered and able to be adopted, or returned to their colony. These cats will be handled on a case by case basis and your Foster Care Coordinator will make sure you are aware of all of the specific needs of the cat.

If medicine is to be administered, it will be provided for you and instructions given as to dosage. **Please follow instructions carefully and be diligent about medicating on schedule.**

It is imperative that the foster cats be kept away from other animals, both to prevent the spread of illness and disease, and to lessen the stress on the foster cat. If any conditions with the foster cats worsen, or if they refuse their medication, please contact your Foster Care Coordinator. The cat may need to be brought in for a check-up.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION AND SOCIALIZATION:

Certain cats may need to be placed into foster care for modification of unwanted behaviors or general socialization. For example, a cat that is so nervous that he is constantly hiding in the back of his cage and refusing to eat will benefit from individualized love and attention in a foster home.

Likewise, a kitten that does not enjoy human interaction will benefit from spending time around people in a home environment.

Volunteers that take in these special assignments must be prepared for a little extra work. These animals need extra time to help build their trust. Trust-building can sometimes occur through hand-feeding, calm attention and possibly some minor training. These animals will be handled on a case-by-case basis and any specific handling instructions will be relayed to you when the cat is picked up.

COMMON HEALTH CONDITIONS

While the veterinarian or Stray HELP intake coordinator checks animals over to make sure they appear healthy upon arrival, most illnesses have an incubation period between exposure and the onset of symptoms and can also be brought on by the stress of a move into a new environment. Please watch your foster cats carefully for any changes in their normal behavior or habits (eating, drinking, energy level, urinating and defecating). **If your foster cat shows any of the following symptoms, please call the Foster Care Coordinator to start the appropriate treatment.**

- Loss of appetite – This can be normal the first day as foster adjusts to a new home. If not eating continues into the second day then call the Foster Care Coordinator.
- Diarrhea – If stools are soft but not watery, monitor for two days. All cats brought into the Stray HELP adoption program are wormed and this may impact the cat's stool. If there is no improvement by the third day, call the Foster Care Coordinator. Call immediately if stools are watery.
- Blood in stool – call immediately.
- Difficulty urinating – call immediately.
- Vomiting – Call immediately if your foster throws up food two or more times, if the vomit is bile or liquid, or if vomiting is frequent or projectile.
- Dehydration – Dehydration is generally associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, pinch the animal's skin gently just above the shoulder blades at the base of the neck. If the skin springs back slowly (takes more than 1 second), then the animal is dehydrated. Call immediately – dehydration can be fatal to cats!
- Sneezing – Call on that day if the animal sneezes more than three times a day, or for two days in a row. (If you are fostering cats, check the litter box to see if the litter is overly dusty as this may be the cause of the sneezing.)
- Call the same day if you notice your animal has a runny nose or congested-sounding breathing. These are often signs of an Upper Respiratory Infection. These are the animal versions of having a cold. Stress, like that caused by a new environment, can cause illnesses to present.
- Coughing – call the same day.
- Hair loss, even in very small patches – call immediately. This should not be confused with normal shedding.
- Watery, goopy or red eyes – call the same day.

- Itchy/dirty/smelly ears – call the same day.
- If your foster cat is on medication but is getting worse or not getting better as expected – call that day.

Some cats do not show traditional signs of illness. They may be less active than normal, have a loss of appetite, avoid their litter box or avoid other animals or people. Please call us if you notice any of these changes.

FIRST AID AND EMERGENCY CARE

An animal's health can deteriorate rapidly. If you discover that your foster is in a very weak condition, here are the things you should immediately do while you are attempting to contact the Foster Care Coordinator or Ann:

1. Check body temperature. Animals should be warm, not hot or cold to the touch. Warm up a cold animal gradually with a hot water bottle or snuggle safe heat disk. Cool off your foster by wiping the pads of their feet with a cotton ball dipped in rubbing alcohol.
2. If infant animals become hypoglycemic, gently and carefully introduce a small amount (1 to 2 milliliters) of a sugary solution such as corn syrup or maple syrup that is warmed up in a little water. Pedialyte can also be used. Continue this every fifteen (15) minutes or so until the animal is strong enough to nurse or eat on their own.
3. If eyes are crusted over, gently apply a warm compress for several minutes until crust can be carefully removed.

Remember: DO NOT take the animal to your veterinarian without the Foster Care Coordinator's prior approval. We have veterinarians that we work with and will instruct you on what you should do in case of illness or injury. We cannot reimburse you for unapproved costs incurred.

If an animal dies in your home

In the unfortunate event that a foster animal passes away at your home, please call and inform us. We require that the body be brought to Stray HELP for proper disposal. Death generally occurs because of one of the following: congenital defects, low birth weight, diseases resulting from inadequate diet fed to the mother, infectious diseases, lack of antibodies from mother, severe intestinal parasites or other causes.

Place the deceased cat in a plastic bag. Place the bag in a box and put it in the coolest possible place (a freezer is best) until you are able to reach Stray HELP. Please understand that death is an unfortunate possibility when fostering animals, especially infants. Usually the circumstances are unavoidable. Remember it's not your fault! Also remember that you gave that cat the best opportunity to survive.

EXTERNAL PARASITES

Fleas are insects that love to feed on dogs and cats. A foster animal with fleas will be given a general flea treatment or a flea bath depending on the severity of the infestation and the age of the animal. **Do not use any over-the-counter flea treatments at all.** If you notice fleas within a week of bringing the animal in your home, call your Foster Care Coordinator. Although we do try to prevent fleas, we recommend that all of your pets be on a flea preventative such as Revolution.

Ticks carry diseases and your animals must be monitored for them. If you notice a tick engorged in your animal (it will feel like a small, soft bump), wrap a piece of tissue around it, pinch it firmly as close to the animal's skin as you can, and slowly pull out the body and head. If the body breaks off, the tick will die. Don't worry if the head is left in the pet's body - the animal's body will eventually push it out on its own. If you are able to pull out the entire body, the tick will still be alive. Dispose of it in the toilet. Do not squeeze it or it will pop and you could risk exposure to disease from the blood. There will be a scab on the animal for a week or two. You can treat this area with a small amount of antibiotic ointment.

Ear Mites live in the ear canals. Though microscopic, they leave behind a chunky brown residue, which is their fecal matter. You can use cotton balls dipped in a small amount of mineral oil to clean out the ears. Then the ears must be treated with ear mite medication. If you suspect an ear mite infestation, please contact your Foster Care Coordinator.

INTERNAL PARASITES

Every cat in the Stray HELP foster program is treated for internal parasites. Your foster will be treated before coming to your home (age permitting) and you will be given a schedule for follow up treatment. If worms are seen (they often resemble spaghetti or rice) in the stool, vomit or around the anus, contact the Foster Care Coordinator; continued treatment may be necessary. It may be necessary to collect a stool sample for analysis. When bringing in a stool sample, only a small amount is needed and it doesn't matter if litter is attached to it.

ZOONOTIC DISEASES

Zoonotic diseases are diseases that are transmittable from animals to humans. Appropriate cleaning and good hygiene prevent transmission. The following is a list of transmittable diseases common to cats:

- Roundworms - transmittable through fecal exposure.
- Coccidia / Giardia (internal parasites) - transmittable through fecal exposure.
- Toxoplasmosis, transmitted through fecal exposure, can be serious to a pregnant woman.
- Ringworm skin lesions - transmitted through contact and handling.
- Fleas transmitted by proximity.
- Sarcoptic Mange (Scabies) is a contagious skin condition transmitted by handling an infected animal. **If you see any of these signs, notify the Foster Care Coordinator immediately.**

ANIMAL TO ANIMAL DISEASE TRANSMISSION

- **Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) - Cats only. Highly contagious.** We test our cats and kittens before placing them in foster homes. It is transmitted through saliva and nasal secretions, urine, feces and milk from infected cats.
- **Feline Retro Virus (FIV - Feline Aids) - Cats only. Not easily transmitted. FIV virus does not survive outside a host.** Transmitted through bite wounds and bodily fluids.

- **Upper Respiratory Infection - Cats only. Highly contagious.** Vaccinations protect against most of them. Stray HELP requires foster family's own pets to be currently vaccinated for FVRCP. Sick cats must be kept isolated from other animals.
- **Distemper - Cats only. Highly contagious.** It is transmitted through fecal matter. Stray HELP requires foster family's own pets to be currently vaccinated for FVRCP.
- **Rabies** - Your pets should be current on their rabies vaccinations.
- **Parasites** - External and Internal
- **Ringworm skin lesions** - Transmitted through contact and handling.
- **Fungal infections.**

To prevent transmission of these diseases to your pets, we recommend that fostered pets are kept separated from your own pets. During initial quarantine time, this is essential and required.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLEANING PROCEDURES

The most common disease organisms affecting Stray HELP rescues are viruses, bacteria, parasites and fungi. It is important to consider all objects with which a foster cat may come into contact and disinfect accordingly. This will help protect you, your companion animals, and any future fosters.

Cleaning Agents

It is important to consider which cleaning agents are safe to use on certain surfaces. All surfaces may not be able to be cleaned, but thorough washing and/or vacuuming helps to decrease the numbers of environmental pathogens.

One of the best all-around disinfectants is common household bleach. When using bleach as a disinfectant, the recommended dilution is one (1) part bleach to thirty (30) parts water (i.e. 1/4 cup bleach to 1 gallon water) and the recommended contact time is 10 minutes. Color-Safe bleach does not disinfect like regular bleach.

Wash animal laundry in a separate load from family laundry. Don't use a fabric softener. Use white vinegar in laundry cycle to reduce static.

CAUTION: DO NOT USE TILEX®! IT CONTAINS ANTIFREEZE AND IS DEADLY IF INGESTED BY ANIMALS.

Reading Labels

It is important to read the labels on all cleaning products, air fresheners and laundry detergents you use in your home. Many contain ingredients that are hazardous, particularly to small children and animals. Be on the lookout for signal words: danger or poison, warning and caution and avoid those products.

ADOPTION POLICY / ADOPTION REFERRAL POLICY

If a friend or family member is interested in adopting one of your foster cats, please refrain from promising them the animal. All adoptions must go through the Stray HELP application process and we would not want to have an uncomfortable situation should one of your friends not meet our adoption criteria. If one of your friends

is interested in adopting, please let us know. For the best interest of the cats, we will not put a pet on adoption hold. Adoptions are based on the best fit for each cat or kitten once they are made available for adoption. We can let your friend know when the animal is going up for adoption and they can always submit their completed application to begin the vetting process.

If you decide you just can't part with your foster animal and you want to adopt it, please inform the Foster Care Coordinator. **Your foster will still need to be spayed/neutered and all normal adoption fees and processes will apply.**

RETURNING ANIMALS TO THE RESCUE

Before you decide whether or not you can commit yourself to fostering, there is one major point you must consider. It is important that foster parents understand that sometimes an animal will not survive, even with the best of care. It is possible that a cat or kitten may become seriously ill, with no treatment to aid in recovery; it may become necessary to euthanize the animal. Each foster parent will handle this differently. These decisions are never made in haste, and only when euthanasia is in the best interest of the animal. If this decision must be made it will be made by Stray HELP. There will be times when you may not agree with the decision, but by fostering Stray HELP cats you agree to accept the decisions as made by Stray HELP.

We recognize that returning a foster animal to the rescue can be very emotional, even under the best of circumstances. Many foster volunteers say their least favorite part of the Foster Program is returning the animal and losing contact with it. Our Foster Coordinators are also foster volunteers and are available to offer emotional support to you. You are not alone!

Our rescue works diligently to place all adoptable animals in a loving, responsible home. We verify references and even conduct a home visit. We often remain in contact with adopters by offering support and guidance to them when transitioning their new pet into their home and family.

After returning a foster animal to the rescue, please be sure to thoroughly clean any items of your own that the animal(s) used to prevent possible spread of infection from one foster to the next.

BEING A FOSTER PARENT CAN BE DEEPLY REWARDING

The individualized attention you provide to your foster animals is priceless - you are making a lasting impact on their physical and emotional well-being. Foster parents will always become emotionally involved with the animal they are caring for; it is that bond between foster cat and foster family which enables foster cat to become ready for adoption.