



Foster Parent Manual

**A Guide to Caring for HSMC's Tiniest
Rescues!**

www.thehsmc.org/foster
Foster@thehsmc.org

6/2026

Thank you for becoming a foster parent!

The Goal of Foster Care:

Keep animals warm, clean, happy, and provide adequate nutrition.

Protect from infectious disease.

Provide positive socialization with people and littermates.

Nurture animals in preparation for adoption.

Q&A

Is there a youth foster program?

Students ages 16+ can foster with a parent/guardian's approval.

The HSMC offers students who foster community service hours per day.

The student must also be a registered volunteer for hours to be tracked.

How can I reach the foster coordinator?

Email: Foster@thehsmc.org

Phone: (Communicate with foster coordinator for cell #)

Facebook Messenger: In the event you are unable to get in touch with the Foster Coordinator, try us through Facebook or other social media platforms.

What do I do if my kitten is lethargic and unable to eat?

These symptoms are sometimes referred to as "fading kitten syndrome". See **page 14** for details on how to help the kitten with warming support and increasing their blood sugar. Kittens must be WARM before trying to syringe or assist feed.

Contact Foster Coordinator ASAP.

How much and how often do I feed my kitten?

For bottle babies, please refer to the table on **page 7**.

Mush babies and kittens eating on their own typically eat 4-5 times daily.

Checking your kittens weight with an at-home food scale is a good practice to make sure they are gaining weight appropriately.

What do I do if my animal is sick?

See page 12 for a list of common symptoms and how urgently they should be addressed by HSMC medical staff. Sick animal appointments can be booked through your Foster Coordinator.

What do I do if my foster is having a Medical Emergency?

During business hours, contact the Foster Coordinator ASAP for direction.

After hours, refer to the emergency care protocol on **pages 22-23** of this manual.

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To minimize the risk of infectious disease and keep all pets safe, we ask foster parents NOT to introduce foster animals to owned resident pets. Foster animals should always be kept separate from owned pets.

Maddie's Pet Assistant is a useful app that gives you 24/7 access to expert advice from shelter veterinarians and behaviorists

Kitten Wellness/Vaccine Visits

Wellness visits are scheduled as needed based on the animal’s age and needs.

Wellness visits include an updated weight, vaccine, deworming, Panleuk testing, and flea preventative. Call the Foster Coordinator immediately for animals that are sick or injured.

You will receive email/ text message reminders from your Foster Coordinator.

Kittens can be spayed and neutered at 2.0 lbs. (8 weeks).

Kitten Age	Weight	Vaccine Due
4 weeks	0.8-1.0 lbs	Wellness visit
6 weeks	1.0-1.5 lbs	FVRCP Booster (at 1.5 lbs)
8 weeks	1.5-2.0 lbs	FVRCP Booster (2 weeks from last)
10 weeks	2.0-3.0 lbs	Surgery (usually leaves foster care)
12 weeks	3.0+ lbs	FVRCP annual and Rabies vaccines

Kitten Developmental Periods

0-2 weeks old: Born with eyes closed and tiny folded ears. Spends most of the time asleep.

2-3 weeks old: Eyes open, ears folded, taking wobbly steps, and becoming more aware of surroundings.

3-4 weeks old: Canines and incisors are coming in. Becoming steadier on their feet and discovering the litter box.

4-5 weeks old: Okay to start offering "mush".

5-7 weeks old: Alert to surroundings, playful, and active. Continue socialization. Kittens start to develop their personalities. Okay to start offering dry food.

7-8 weeks old: Continued socialization with people and littermates. Spayed or neutered and ready for adoption at 8 weeks (3lbs)

Bottle Kittens (0-4 weeks)

Bottle babies are orphaned kittens between 0-5 weeks old and depend on us for feedings, warmth, cleaning, and stimulation for bowel movements/urination.

Keeping Warm: Since they can't regulate their own body temperature, it is essential to provide kittens this age with warmth. This usually is in the form of a heating pad for continuous warmth, and heating disk for travel.

Keeping Clean: Before they're mobile enough to use a litter box (under 3 weeks or so), kittens will need assistance with urinating and defecating by stimulation. This is done with a baby wipe, moistened cotton ball or tissue and rubbing the kitten's genitalia and rectum in a small circular motion. This should be done before and after each feeding time. You can expect some urination each time, and defecation at least once daily. Kitten stool should be a brownish yellow color with a paste-like consistency. After being stimulated, ensure the kitten is clean and dry.

Feeding- How much and how often:

- The rule of thumb is 1cc of formula per 1 Ounce of weight each feeding.
- Example: 5oz kitten = 5cc of formula for each feeding.
- Bottle babies can be fed every 3-4 hours during the day.
- Nighttime feeding can be every 6-7 hours.



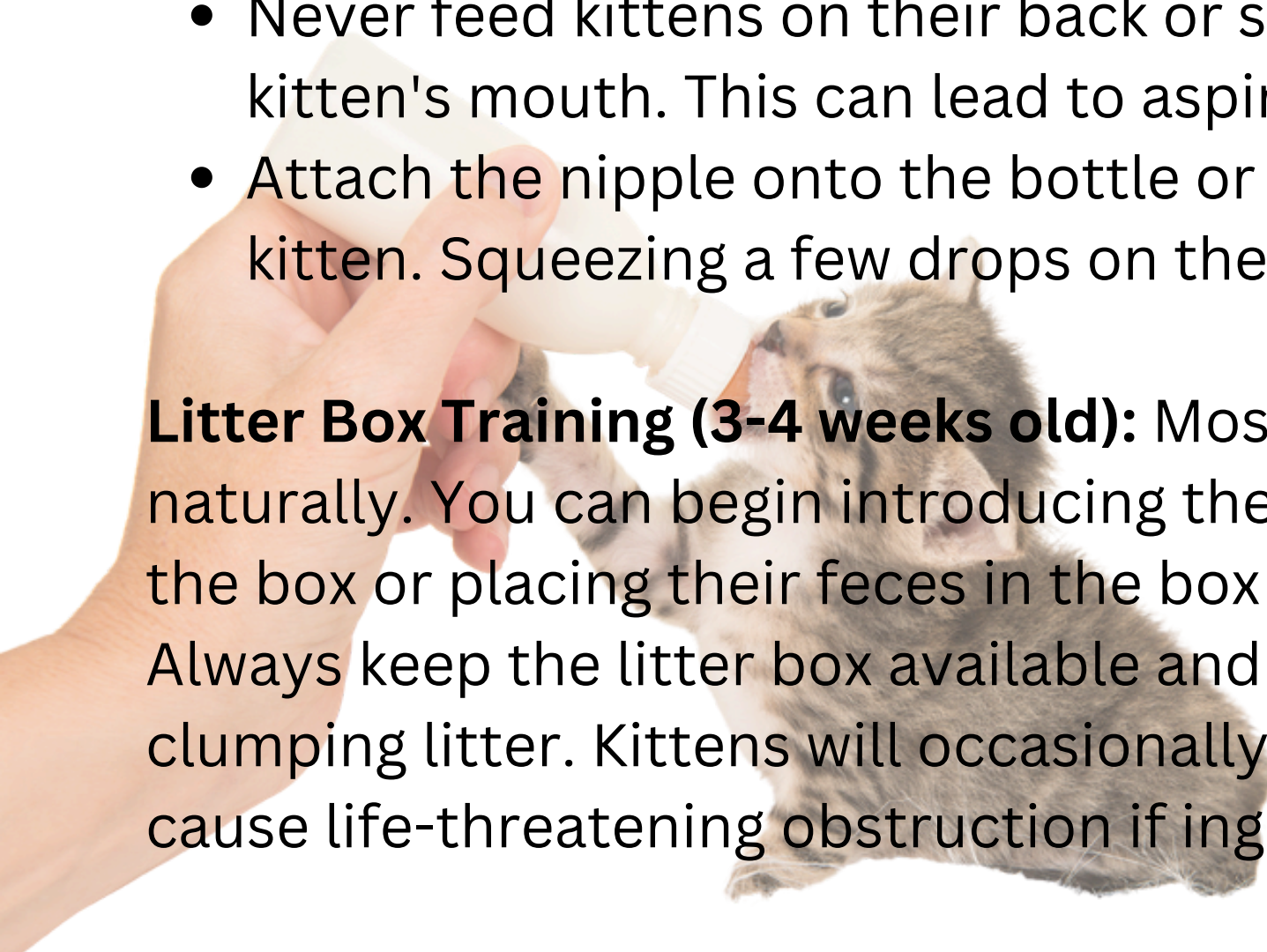
Feeding- Preparing the Kitten Milk Replacement Formula:

- Mix 1 scoop of powder for every 2 scoops of warm water
- Make sure milk is mixed thoroughly with no chunks and is warm (test this by rubbing a few drops on your wrist). Microwave a few seconds if not warm enough.
- The mixed formula must be kept in the fridge and discarded after 24 hours if not used. Always refrigerate mixed and unmixed formula.

Feeding- Holding the Kitten:

- Kittens can be gently wrapped in a blanket or towel to minimize wiggling or placed on a surface belly down for feeding.
- Never feed kittens on their back or squeeze formula forcefully into the kitten's mouth. This can lead to aspirating fluid into the kitten's lungs.
- Attach the nipple onto the bottle or syringe and gently introduce it to the kitten. Squeezing a few drops on their cheek can encourage them to latch.

Litter Box Training (3-4 weeks old): Most kittens take to litter training naturally. You can begin introducing them to this by stimulating them over the box or placing their feces in the box so they can smell that it is there. Always keep the litter box available and close for kittens to find. Never use clumping litter. Kittens will occasionally eat their litter. Clumping litter can cause life-threatening obstruction if ingested by kittens.



"Mush" Babies (4-6 weeks)

"Mush" is a term used to describe the mixture of kitten milk replacement formula powder, warm water, and canned food used to wean kittens from bottle feeding to eating on their own. This usually happens at about 5-6 weeks of age when canine teeth are emerging. Kittens are becoming much more mobile and social in this stage of kittenhood. Mush can be placed in a shallow dish and introduced to kittens. Some kittens may bite the dish or walk through the mush. Be patient. It may take a few feedings to get them to eat on their own.



Socialization: Be sure to play with and handle your kittens often. Encourage them to redirect inappropriate play, such as biting or scratching, with toys or other alternatives. Never punish or scold a kitten!

Weaning: transitioning to canned food

Once Kittens bite at the nipple during bottle feedings and can lick formula from your finger, they're ready for the weaning process. "Mush" is made with canned kitten food, warm water, and kitten milk replacement powder. Once a kitten masters eating on its own, bottle feedings can be reduced, then stopped, and formula mush can be slowly decreased. Some kittens may still need supplemental bottle feedings until it is confirmed that they are eating enough on their own

Bathing:

This stage of kittenhood can often be messy, and kittens may need to be bathed to remove any food or feces on them. You can use a shallow sink of warm water and blue Dawn dish soap to gently bathe them. It is imperative to completely dry the kitten with a warm towel and keep it warm until completely dry.



Nearing Adoption Age

"The Goal is Good-Bye"

When your fosters reach 2 months and 2 pounds it is time to schedule the spay/neuter surgery and send them off to find their new homes. Saying goodbye can be tough, but because of your love and care, these kittens have the best possible chance at a happy, healthy life with a new family.

Scheduling Surgery

Your foster coordinator will add kittens to the surgery list during a routine wellness visit.



Nursing Mom with Kittens

Mother cats and their babies need a stress-free environment so the mother can feel like she is keeping her babies safe: a calm, quiet room away from daily activities, young children, and household pets. If the mom neglects any kittens or is aggressive, please contact your foster coordinator.

Creating her space:

The following items should be in the room for the mother and babies.

- When first coming home, place the kittens and mother in the whelping box and close the door. Give her time to explore and get acclimated. It may take a few days for her to feel comfortable when you enter the room.
- Provide ample wet food, dry food, and water for the mother cat

Whelping Box: This box is for the mother cat to lie on her side while nursing the babies. It should be shallow enough for the mother to leave but have high enough sides to keep the babies from wandering. Line with blankets, newspaper, or puppy pads.

Litter pans with non-clumping litter should be placed away from food. It's important to observe frequently to ensure that mom is grooming and nursing well. Also, try to weigh the kittens daily.



Fading Kitten Syndrome

What is "Fading Kitten Syndrome" (FKS)?

FKS is a series of life-threatening symptoms, sometimes referred to as "failure to thrive", that describes a neonatal kitten that "crashes", suddenly becoming ill or unresponsive, even if it was previously healthy.

Some research suggests that 15- 30% of neonatal kittens may ultimately succumb to FKS. While many contributing factors may cause fading kitten syndrome, two common ones are hypothermia (being cold) and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar).

Many times, other underlying issues, such as congenital defects, diseases, etc., may not be treatable and contribute to a kitten's fading.

Symptoms:

- Hypothermia/low body temperature (<99F): Feeling cool or cold to the touch, particularly in the limbs/ extremities.
- Lethargy- Inability to stand or unresponsiveness to touch.
- Labored breathing- exaggerated breathing, often with the mouth open.
- Excessive Vocalizing- Particularly loud, pained cries combined with any of the above symptoms

What can I do?

In many instances, unfortunately, a fading kitten will not survive, even with medical intervention; however, taking these steps immediately will give the best prognosis!

Provide warmth—Wrap the kitten in a blanket or towel, leaving only its face exposed. Use a heat source (SnuggleSafe, heating pad) as an extra source of heat. To prevent burns, make sure the heat source is not directly touching the kitten.

Increase blood sugar- While warming the kitten, apply light Karo corn syrup to the gums. If Karo is unavailable, use pancake syrup or mix equal sugar and warm water until dissolved. Use a syringe or your finger to place a few drops of the sugar source into the kitten's mouth every 3 minutes. If the kitten is swallowing, feed it a small amount of the sugar source. You should see improvement in 20 minutes if low blood sugar is the cause.

Contact your Foster Coordinator immediately if you have potential FKS.



Puppy Wellness/Vaccine Visits

Underage puppies are required to be seen **EVERY 2 WEEKS** from 4-16 weeks of age by foster staff.

Wellness visits include an updated weight, vaccine, deworming, microchip, and flea/ heartworm preventative. For sick or injured animals, call the Foster Coordinator immediately.

Your foster coordinator will send you email/ text message reminders. Foster staff will also provide a handout outlining when your puppy will return to the shelter for preventative care.

Puppies come back from foster care and are spayed/ neutered at 8 weeks of age.

Puppy Age	Vaccine Due
4 weeks	Wellness visit & Worming
6 weeks	DAPP Booster & Worming
8 weeks	Surgery, Bordatella & DAPP Booster
10 weeks	DAPP Booster
12 weeks	DAPP annual and Rabies vaccine

Puppy Developmental Periods

0-2 weeks old: Born with eyes closed and tiny folded ears. Keep handling to a minimum.

2-3 weeks old: Eyes open, able to handle and socialize more. Ready for the first deworming at 2 weeks.

3-4 weeks old: Begins teething. Becoming steadier on their feet and socializing with people and littermates. Puppies can begin weaning from milk.

4-5 weeks old: Continue socialization with people and littermates. Ready for 2nd deworming at 4 weeks.

5-7 weeks old: Alert to surroundings, playful, and active. Start to develop their personalities. Introduce dry food. Ready for their third deworming and first set of vaccines at 6 weeks old.

7-8 weeks old: Continued socialization with people and littermates. The shelter will spay/ neuter, vaccinate, deworm, and place the puppy for adoption at 8 weeks!



Bottle Puppies (0-4 weeks)

Bottle Feeding: Preparing puppy milk replacements.

Infant puppies (0-4 weeks) need bottle feeding every 3-4 hours during the day and 6-7 hours at night, which is about 6 times per day.

- Mix 1 scoop of formula powder for every 2 scoops of warm water
- Ensure the formula is mixed thoroughly with no chunks and is warm (test this by rubbing a few drops on your wrist). Microwave a few seconds if not warm enough
- Dispose of any mixed formula that is unused within 24 hours. Always refrigerate mixed and unmixed formula.

Bottle Feeding: Holding the puppy.

- Puppies should nurse with their stomachs facing down. Standing on their hind legs is also safe. Never feed puppies on their backs.
- If the puppy is coughing or has milk coming from its nose, stop feeding and reassess the puppy's position and the size of the hole in the nipple, which should be pin-sized.
- Nursing too fast or on their back can cause aspiration or formula to enter their lungs, which can be life-threatening. After each feeding, hold the puppy against a shoulder and pat or massage their back to burp.

Stimulating for Elimination

Puppies will start eliminating on their own at 2-3 weeks old. Before that, they will need to be stimulated to urinate and defecate. This is done after each bottle feeding. Use a cotton ball or tissue moistened with warm water to wipe the puppy's belly and anal gently. At the same time, it's standing on a towel or puppy pad. Normal stool at this age has a toothpaste consistency and yellow mustard coloration. You can expect urination after each feeding and defecation once or twice daily.

After feeding

Once they have been fed and eliminated and seem content, place the puppies back in the space you have provided for them. Puppies should always be kept warm and will spend most of their time cuddling and sleeping. It is normal for puppies to spend 90% of the time sleeping and the other 10% eating.



Weaning Puppies

Puppies are ready to begin weaning from their mother at 3-4 weeks of age (when their teeth begin to erupt).

Transitioning to dry food

Slowly wean puppies from their mother by removing them from her for an hour, 2 to 3 times a day, slowly increasing the time and frequency. Once away from their mother, offer them mush.

To start them out, create a "mush" with puppy milk replacer and wet or solid food. Slowly increase the amount of solid food until they are fully weaned.



Socializing Underage Puppies

Socializing puppies 3-13 weeks is vital for weaning and developing into well-adjusted adult dogs. Here are some socialization tips:

- Allow puppies to approach or not- it is their choice.
- Always make socializing a positive experience.
- Do not punish or scold a puppy. Instead, teach them what you would like by rewarding good behavior with treats and affection and redirecting them to an appropriate toy.
- Provide plenty of puppy-safe items to explore, play with, and chew.
- Ensure you are not the only person handling them; invite friends to meet them!
- To minimize the risk of infectious disease, please keep foster puppies separate from owned pets.
- For their safety: No dog parks, pet stores, or other public places. Puppies should stay in foster homes only.

Nearing Adoption Age

"The Goal is Goodbye"

When your fosters reach 8 weeks, it is time to schedule the spay/neuter surgery and send them off to find their new homes. Saying goodbye can be tough, but because of your love and care, these puppies have the best chance at a happy, healthy life with a new family.



Scheduling Surgery

Your foster coordinator will be the one to add puppies to the surgery list during a routine wellness visit. Please remember no food after midnight the night before the surgery date, and bring puppies in at your scheduled time. Communicate with your foster care coordinator throughout this process.

Nursing Mom with Puppies

Creating a nesting area:

You'll want to give the mother dog and her puppies a quiet, secluded space in your home, away from other pets. A plastic baby pool or large dog bed can create a nesting space where the mother can enter/exit, but the babies can't leave. Ensure the nesting area for mom and babies has soft towels and blankets/ puppy pads. The mother will spend most of her time nursing, cleaning, and caring for her pups. She must be removed regularly to eliminate this while the pups stay in the nesting area.

A nursing mother will need 2-4 times the normal feeding amount to stay healthy. Be sure to feed and provide water to her multiple times throughout the day.



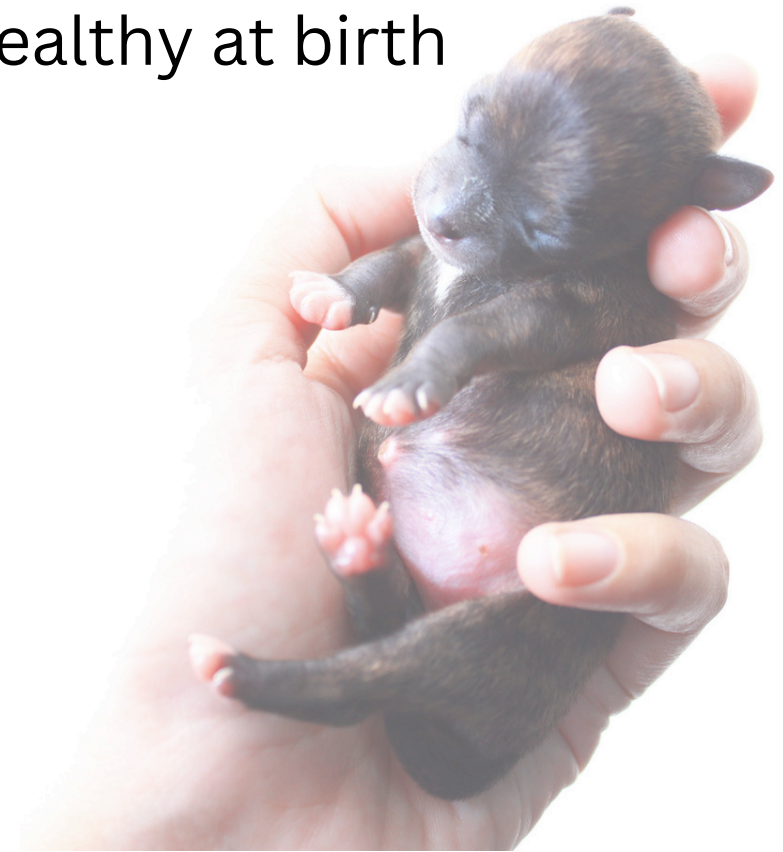
Fading Puppy Syndrome

What is "Fading Puppy Syndrome"?

Fading puppy syndrome occurs when a puppy that was healthy at birth begins to decline around 1-2 weeks old.

The symptoms of a "fading" puppy include the following:

- Lack of activity or appetite
- Weight loss
- Continuous diarrhea or vomiting
- Continuous crying
- Mother dog pushing the puppy out of the nest



Puppies fade very quickly. They will generally not survive without immediate veterinary care.

There is no clear cause for this condition. It is linked to congenital disabilities, environmental stress, and infectious diseases. Early veterinary treatment is imperative, but many fading puppies will not make it, even with the most intensive care.

Please immediately contact the Foster Coordinator at the first signs of Fading puppy Syndrome.

Common Medical Warning Signs

Red flags: If your foster shows any of the following symptoms, please get in touch with the foster coordinator immediately.

- Not eating through multiple feeding periods/ weight loss
- Lethargic (lack of energy)
- Liquid diarrhea/ dehydration
- Repeated vomiting
- Neurological signs (i.e. seizures)
- Wheezing, coughing, or colored eye/ nasal discharge
- Lack of energy or depression, but is still eating
- Loose stool or visible worms present in stool
- Occasional vomiting
- Decreased appetite
- Difficulty urinating or defecating
- Limping
- Behavior that is unusual compared to its usual self

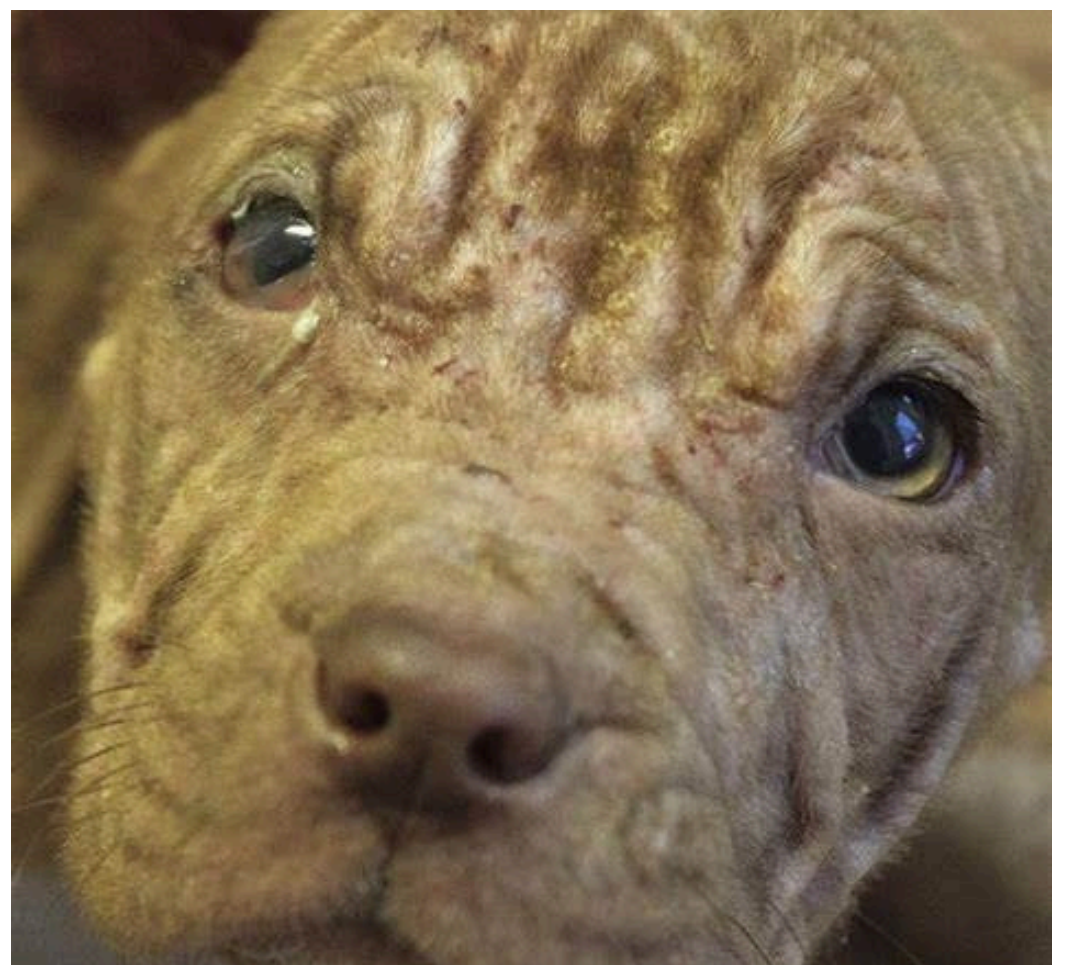
Skin Conditions

Ringworm and scabies are two common skin conditions you may see in your fosters. Contact the Foster Coordinator if you notice hair loss. Always practice good sanitation by washing hands frequently and keeping your foster area clean. These skin conditions are zoonotic and can be passed from your foster to you and your family.

Ringworm (dermatophytosis) is a fungus-caused condition most often presented by patches of hair loss and crusting. It is contagious to other cats, dogs, and people.



Scabies (sarcoptic mange) is a contagious skin condition caused by microscopic mites on the animal's skin and hair follicles. These mites can cause severe itchiness, patchy hair loss, and crusting.



Maddie's Pet Assistant is a useful app that gives you 24/7 access to expert advice from shelter veterinarians and behaviorists

Emergency Protocol

Intestinal parasites ("worms"- may resemble rice or spaghetti), sneezing, coughing, vomiting, and/or diarrhea are generally not considered life-threatening emergencies. If your foster pet(s) is currently experiencing any of these symptoms, please schedule an appointment with the foster Coordinator by calling them directly or calling the office at **352-873-7387** (Please tell the HSMC representative who answers that you're a foster with an emergency and to get medical staff.)

Examples of life-threatening emergencies may include:

Seizures	Difficulty breathing
Traumatic Injury	Unresponsiveness
Fading Kitten Syndrome	Fading Puppy Syndrome

Any Emergency care should be brought to the attention of the Foster Coordinator OR Lead Vet Tech ASAP

Foster Coordinator Phone-_____

Lead Vet Tech Phone-_____

Foster Liaison- _____

Supplies Supplied!

We aim to provide each foster parent with enough food and litter for two weeks, since all underage animals return to HSMC for biweekly preventive care. **Supplies are subject to availability.**

HSMC greatly appreciates the generosity of foster parents who purchase supplies for their foster pets, which helps us save even more lives!

Supplies Include:

- **Pet Carrier**
- **Age-appropriate canned and/or dry food**
- **non-clumping litter and pan**
- **Bottle and/or syringes with nipple**
- **Kitten milk replacer**
- **Puppy milk replacer**
- **Warming support**
- **Gloves, gowns, etc. (upon request)**
- **On-site veterinary care/ medication during posted business hours.**

Animals fostered through this program are legally owned by HSMC. The foster family can not give away or relocate the animals in their temporary care. The foster family can adopt an animal in foster care, but routine adoption procedures still apply. Adoption fees are discounted.

Thank you for being a foster parent!

Your work saves lives!



HSMC staff is not available after hours. All messages (telephone, e-mail, social media) received after the close of business will be returned the following day.

Foster animals are not to be adopted out, shown, or reserved for friends and family outside of the animal's care. All adoptions are first come, first served and must pass the application process.

(Fosters may get the first opportunity to adopt at half price with an approved application)

SHELTER HOURS:
Monday - Saturday
10 am-6 pm
Phone Number 352-873-7387

