

Goal: Prompt identification and response to diarrhea in foster kittens to prevent systemic dehydration and illness. Most bouts of diarrhea will resolve with time and supportive care, but severe or prolonged diarrhea requires medical attention. If left unaddressed, severe diarrhea in kittens can cause dehydration, hypothermia, lethargy, and hypoglycemia and can indicate systemic disease in adult cats.

Recognition:

| Fecal Scoring Chart | | |
|---------------------|---|--|
| SCORE | SPECIMEN EXAMPLE | CHARACTERISTICS |
| 1 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very hard and dry Often expelled as individual pellets Requires much effort to expel from body Leaves no residue on ground when picked up |
| 2 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firm, but not hard, pliable Segmented in appearance Little or no residue on ground when picked up |
| 3 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Log shaped, moist surface Little or no visible segmentation Leaves residue on ground, but holds form when picked up |
| 4 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very moist and soggy Log shaped Leaves residue on ground and loses form when picked up |
| 5 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very moist but has a distinct shape Present in piles rather than logs Leaves residue on ground and loses form when picked up |
| 6 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has texture, but no defined shape Present as piles or spots Leaves residue on ground when picked up |
| 7 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watery No texture Present in flat puddles |

- **Normal:** A fecal score of 4 is the ideal but It is normal for kittens to have a fecal score of 5, which will appear soft-formed and pasty, particularly at the beginning of fostering as they transition to a different diet and their gastrointestinal systems continue to develop.
- **Diarrhea:** Fecal scores of 6-7 on the Purina Fecal Scoring System are considered diarrhea in kittens
- **Acute diarrhea:** Diarrhea that lasts less than 10-14 days
- **Chronic diarrhea:** Diarrhea that lasts more than 14 days

Causes:

- Endoparasites
- Diet change
- Stress
- Overfeeding (particularly in kittens)
- Under-developed GI system in kittens
- Antibiotic therapy
- Recent surgery
- Infectious or inflammatory diseases, including viral and bacterial infections

Clinical signs can include:

- Increased frequency or volume of defecation, straining to defecate
- Soft to liquid stool, with or without the presence of blood or mucus
- Pasty, light colored stool
- Loss of control of defecation, leaking feces

General management of diarrhea that LA Foster Team will oversee for foster patients:

- Assess general health and preventative management practices:
 - Check weight trends.
 - Ensure preventative deworming & vaccinations schedule are up to date.
- For kittens, discuss possibility of overfeeding and potential contribution of stress:
 - Overfeeding kittens can cause diarrhea. Ensure fosters are feeding small amounts of appropriate food multiple times a day instead of large amounts once or twice daily.
 - Ensure hide boxes and areas for perching are provided for all cats; ensure animals are being fed separately to prevent food-related stress; ensure enough litterboxes are present.

Management of mild diarrhea in otherwise healthy patients:

- Mild cases include patients with loose stool (fecal score of 5) but are bright and responsive, have a healthy body condition, are eating well, and are hydrated.
- If patient remains healthy but fecal score does not improve within 7 days, schedule appointment with veterinarian.
 - Based on veterinary discretion, use the treatment protocol described below as needed.

Scenarios in which a foster needs to see a veterinarian as soon as possible:

- Diarrhea with little to no appetite for over 24 hours, lethargy, or persistent vomiting
- Severe diarrhea (FS 7) that is pouring out of the kitten and that the kitten does not have control over
- Severe diarrhea (FS 7) that the kitten has control over for more than 12 hours
- Bloody diarrhea
- Diarrhea (FS 6) that persists for 2 days
- Kitten appears not to be gaining weight or starts losing weight for 2 days
- Kitten is overtly dehydrated (sunken eyes, prolonged skin tent, pale mucous membranes)

MANAGEMENT OF SICK PATIENTS:

- Kittens that present with diarrhea and are clinically ill are treated aggressively due to the risk of rapid clinical decline related to dehydration.
- Clinical signs may include:
 - Weight loss OR failure to gain weight for ≥ 2 days

- Poor body condition
- Quiet, depressed
- Dehydration
- Poor appetite
- Blood in stool
- Vomiting

Diagnostic Protocol:

- Always perform a parvo IDEXX SNAP test to check for panleukopenia in kittens that initially present with diarrhea and systemic illness or kittens with severe diarrhea, regardless of systemic clinical signs.
 - If test is positive, refer to LA Foster panleukopenia protocol
 - If test is negative, follow the below protocol.
 - Due to the intermittent and transient shedding of panleukopenia virus, patients that initially test negative but are highly suspicious should be retested for panleukopenia at the recheck appointment, especially if they are not clinically improving.

Treatment Protocol:

1. Oral liquid Panacur – refer to program veterinarian for dosing
2. Oral liquid Ponazuril – refer to program veterinarian for dosing
 - a. It is safe and acceptable to re-dose this medication if a patient presents with diarrhea even if the patient received Ponazuril at intake only a few days prior.
 - b. Treat any patients with pasty, pale stool.
 - c. Provide disposable litterboxes to change 1-2x daily to prevent reinfection with coccidia.
3. Metronidazole – refer to program veterinarian for dosing.
 - a. Shake well before use.
4. Administer a daily probiotic for 7-10 days as symptomatic therapy.
5. Keep the kitten’s hind end clean and dry – this may require bathing/rinsing of the hind end and can require shaving of long hair that traps loose feces.
 - a. Apply diaper rash cream/ointment as needed (refer to program veterinarian for dosing) to soothe irritated skin.
6. If dehydrated, administer warmed LRS fluids subcutaneously in clinic during presenting exam – refer to program veterinarian for dosing.
7. LA Foster team member should follow up with foster parent 2 and 5 days after the initial appointment to determine if patient is improving. If diarrhea has not improved in 7 days with the above treatment or patients have bloody diarrhea or patients are losing weight, then schedule a recheck veterinary appointment.

For refractory cases that result in chronic diarrhea over 14 days:

- Reassessment by veterinarian needed
- Perform an FeLV test on any patient with chronic/refractory disease.
 - If positive, ensure patient has been thoroughly examined for signs of active FeLV infection. Discuss case with the primary attending veterinarian and the Director of the Volunteer & Kitten Programs for case management.
- Re-dose Ponazuril if it’s been 10-14 days since last dosing – refer to program veterinarian for dosing.
- Send out a fecal sample for the IDEXX Feline Diarrhea RealPCR Panel (comprehensive)
 - Request this test by ordering a fecal float (#501) WITH the add-on comprehensive feline diarrhea RealPCR panel (#26271). This is more cost effective than sending out the comprehensive panel (#2627) only.

- Switch diet according to program veterinarian preference and availability such as Hill's i/d, Hill's w/d or Royal Canin High Energy for 2 weeks.
 - If no improvement after 2 weeks, consider:
 - adding 1 tbsp pumpkin twice daily for bulk
 - or switching to a hypoallergenic diet, particularly if patient suffers from both diarrhea and dermatologic symptoms indicating a food sensitivity
- Contact the Director of Volunteer & Kitten Programs and program veterinarian to determine most appropriate next steps, to review past treatments and any additional diagnostics performed, and to ensure that patient's stay in foster care is not prolonged.

Tips for discharging diarrhea patients:

Instructions/advice to provide to foster families:

- Reiterate the importance of not overfeeding kittens.
- Remind of the importance of keeping the hind end as clean as possible to prevent irritation to the surrounding skin and matting of the fur
- Explain use of medications, probiotic.
- Encourage and remind foster family to call the ASPCA Foster team with a patient update in 2 days.