



3910 Old Canoe Creek Rd  
St Cloud FL 34772  
407-742-8000

# Pet Foster Handbook



Updated May 2025

Click on a topic to go to that page.

Section	Topic/Link	Page
General Information		
	<a href="#">Types of fosters</a>	2
	<a href="#">Supplies</a>	3
	<a href="#">Veterinary care</a>	3
	<a href="#">Recognizing emergencies</a>	4
	<a href="#">Recognizing non-emergencies</a>	4
	<a href="#">Guidelines</a>	5
	<a href="#">Failed fosters</a>	6
Cats/Kittens	<a href="#">Kitten/cat information</a>	6
Dogs/Puppies	<a href="#">Puppy/dog information</a>	9
Diseases and Illnesses		
	<a href="#">Zoonotic diseases</a>	10
	<a href="#">Upper respiratory infections</a>	11
	<a href="#">Feline parvo virus</a>	12
	<a href="#">Ringworm</a>	13
	<a href="#">Mange</a>	14
	<a href="#">Intestinal parasites</a>	15
	<a href="#">General warning signs</a>	16

## Types of fosters:

- Time:
  - Short term (a few days) to
  - long term (three or more months).
  - Most foster placements are from two to five weeks.
  
- Species:
  - Dogs, cats, occasionally other small animals.
  
- Ages:
  - Cats eating on their own
  - Dogs eating on their own
  - Kittens with or without mother
  - Puppies with or without mother
  - Senior cats
  - Senior dogs
  
- Special needs:
  - Bottle feeding
  - Recovering from surgery
  - Gain weight
  - Attain age
  - Socialization



## Supplies

Osceola County Animal Services will provide all of the supplies needed to care for the animal(s) for their entire time in foster care. These supplies include, but are not limited to the following:

<b>All foster animals</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🐾 food (may be canned and/or dry)</li> <li>🐾 medication (as needed)</li> <li>🐾 special instructions</li> <li>🐾 toys</li> <li>🐾 crate</li> <li>🐾 food/water bowls</li> <li>🐾 bedding and/or towels</li> </ul>	
<b>Cats/Kittens</b>	<b>Dogs/Puppies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🐾 cage/condo (as needed)</li> <li>🐾 litter</li> <li>🐾 litter pan</li> <li>🐾 other items as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🐾 collar</li> <li>🐾 leash</li> <li>🐾 shampoo</li> <li>🐾 other items as needed</li> </ul>

## Veterinary Care

For the most part, all veterinary care required for foster animals will be completed in the veterinary suite at the shelter on Old Canoe Creek Road in St Cloud.

Appointments will be scheduled with the foster on weekdays between the hours of 9:00 am and 4:00 pm as these are the hours that the clinic staff is on duty.

Appointments will be scheduled for:

- 🐾 Vaccinations
- 🐾 Wellness checkups
- 🐾 Weigh In
- 🐾 Surgical Procedures
- 🐾 Grooming
- 🐾 Return to shelter



## Emergency Veterinary Care

Occasionally, emergencies arise when dealing with a foster animal.

- 🐾 Weekdays, 8am until 5pm:  
Immediately call the on-call vet tech at 407-742-8000. Inform whoever answers the phone that you have a foster animal emergency.
- 🐾 During hours not included above:  
Phone the on-call Vet Tech at 407-908-3388

There are emergency pet clinics with which Animal Services has a contract, but fosters need to receive permission prior to utilizing these facilities. The on-call vet tech will have details and travel instructions.

## Recognizing Emergencies

An emergency would be any of the following:

- 🐾 seizures,
- 🐾 excessive vomiting,
- 🐾 extreme lethargy,
- 🐾 respiratory distress,
- 🐾 injury (broken bones, severe swelling, uncontrolled bleeding)

## Non emergencies

Non emergencies are

- 🐾 mild vomiting,
- 🐾 diarrhea,
- 🐾 mild lethargy.



Some of these can be addressed with a change of diet or other simple changes. Please consult an experienced foster volunteer or vet tech about some of these strategies.

## Guidelines for foster volunteers

- 🐾 Respond within 24 hours to any communications from Animal Services staff.
- 🐾 Immediately report to OCAS staff on any behavior or health concerns.
- 🐾 You will not be reimbursed for any expenses incurred if you take the animal to a private veterinarian or Emergency Veterinarian without prior approval.
- 🐾 Please, no unannounced visits to the Vet Staff. *(The Vet Staff is very busy and may not be available for a walk-in)*
- 🐾 Foster animals should be kept isolated from personal pets to avoid possible cross infection.
- 🐾 OCAS will not provide or be responsible for the medical care or treatment of your personal pets should they contract any diseases or parasites from your foster animal.
- 🐾 Provide changes in your personal information (name, address, phone, email)
- 🐾 Foster animals remain property of Osceola County Animal Services. The OCAS staff will make all final decisions regarding the placement of all foster animals. Foster Animals are not to be given, but may be adopted by the foster (see failed foster below).
- 🐾 Foster Animals are not to be cared for by anyone other than the approved OCAS Foster Parent.
- 🐾 Foster animals are to be kept in the home of the foster parent.
- 🐾 The number of animals placed in one foster home may be limited at any given time.
- 🐾 Foster animals may not be transported outside Osceola County without prior permission from the program managers.
- 🐾 A home visit may be conducted prior to and /or during fostering.
- 🐾 OCAS staff will inform the foster of any health problems, the expected length of care, and the date the animal/s may need to be returned for vaccinations etc.
- 🐾 Foster animals must be returned upon request on any scheduled date for follow ups, vaccinations, treatments, meet and greets, on and off-site events, etc.

- 🐾 Every effort is made to adopt foster pets as well as the pets in the shelter. Some situations may arise that would prohibit this. These situations could be but are not limited to animals which exhibit aggressive or undesirable behavior, health conditions, physical conditions, owner reclaim, etc. Euthanasia may have to, in rare cases, be considered. OCAS reserves the right to make these decisions.
- 🐾 Please return all remaining supplies the way you received them and in an orderly condition.
- 🐾 Fosters will not be reimbursed for any supplies that they purchase without permission.

### Failed Foster

A failed foster is to be celebrated - it is when a foster family decides that they want to adopt the animal that they are fostering. This leads to winners all around - the animal has a home and the family has an animal with whom they are already familiar.

### Cats and Kittens: General Care

- Kittens' Developmental Stages
  - 🐾 Neonatal–Birth to 2 weeks (Either nursing from their mother or bottle feeding every 2 hours).
  - 🐾 At about 10 days the eyes begin to open.
  - 🐾 At about 2 weeks the eyes are fully open.
  - 🐾 Litter box use can start as early as 3 to 4 weeks.
  - 🐾 Kittens can be introduced to wet food at 3-4 weeks. They will try dry food at about 4 weeks.
  - 🐾 Weaned– At 6 weeks and older kittens should be eating on their own and may need to be separated from their mother.

## Feeding - Mother Present

Ideally, kittens go in to foster care with their mother. In this situation, the mom cat will take care of feeding her kittens. Your job will be to feed and care for the mother, as well as providing a place for her and her young charges that is comfortable. At 4 - 6 weeks you will begin the weaning process for the kittens and return the mother to the shelter for adoption.

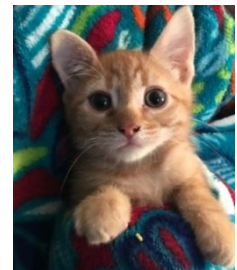
Sometimes, another cat who is nursing will take on kittens that are not hers and treat them as her own. When possible, this cat will be sent to the foster home with the kittens.



## Feeding Orphans – requires special training

- Newborns; every 1 - 2 hours

- 3 - 4 weeks; 6 times each day with soft food and formula
- 6 - 12 weeks; four times a day
- 3 - 6 months old; three times a day



- Handling the Kitten

- In most cases, kittens should not be handled until they are at least 2 weeks old.
- Please hold the kitten with two hands.
- Be very gentle as kittens can be easily injured.
- Children handling kittens need to be closely supervised.

## Waste

Mother cats will groom the kittens after feeding to stimulate them to use the bathroom. In the absence of the mother, the foster should follow this procedure after feeding until the kitten is three weeks old:

- 🐾 Dip a small, soft cloth in warm water
- 🐾 Gently massage the anal and urinal area to stimulate excretion

At about four weeks old, teach the kitten to use the litter box by placing him/her in the litter box just after meals. You may want to cut the side of the litter box down to allow easy access.

## Vaccinations

Vaccinations for disease can generally be administered at about four weeks. The foster may be asked to bring the animal to the shelter for vaccinations at this time.

Foster volunteers will need to make appointments at the front desk to see a vet tech every two weeks for health visits.

## Mature Cats

Cats over four weeks old can generally be pretty independent. Please ask the vet tech or foster contact how much and what type of food to feed the animal and how often. It is recommended that the animal's first meal at the foster home be dry food.



## Puppies and Dogs

### Puppies' Developmental Stages

- 🐾 Neonatal - birth to 12 days – During this time, the puppy is completely dependent on mother for thermoregulation, food, and elimination.
- 🐾 A puppy is born both blind and deaf, but is capable of whining to attract attention from its mother.
- 🐾 For the first 3 days their life, they have "flexor dominance." They curl when you pick them up by the head.
- 🐾 Day 4 to 21 they have "extensor dominance." They stretch when picked up by the head.
- 🐾 Newborn puppies will move toward the side they are touched on or turn their head toward the side their cheek is touched on.
- 🐾 They will root against a warm object.



### Feeding - mother is present

Ideally, puppies go in to foster care with their mother. In this situation, the mom dog will take care of feeding her puppies. Your job will be to feed and care for the mother, as well as providing a place for her and her young charges that is warm and comfortable.

Sometimes, another dog who is nursing will take on puppies that are not hers and treat them as her own. When possible, this cat will be sent to the foster home with the kittens.

Caution must be taken as mothers can be very protective of their young. A mom and her litter should be kept separate from all other animals and as the puppies grow, you should handle each pup to keep them socialized.

## Feeding - Orphans

If there is no mother dog available, the puppies will need to be fed by hand. Animal Services will provide you with the proper formula for the puppies based on their age. Please do not feed puppies or dogs using cow's milk as it can cause some serious digestive problems.

## Feeding Puppies

- 🐾 First 2 weeks, every two hours
- 🐾 4 weeks, transition to solid food, first mixing solid with liquid several times a day.
- 🐾 7 - 8 weeks, all solid dry food

## Handling Puppies

In most cases puppies should not be handled until they are at least two weeks old. Please always hold the puppy with two hands. Be very gentle as puppies can be easily injured.

Children handling puppies need to be closely supervised. At three weeks old, puppies can be handled in short sessions, keeping them warm at all times. If it is cold out, you may use a hot water bottle or heating pad to keep them warm.



Be sure to socialize the puppies and provide them with daily interactions.

## Illnesses and Diseases

### Zoonotic Diseases

Zoonotic diseases are diseases spread between animals and humans. These diseases are caused by bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi that are carried by animals and insects. Examples are rabies, mites, fungal infections(ringworm),

psittacosis, toxoplasmosis, hookworms, roundworms, tapeworms, salmonellosis, and giardia infection.

- To avoid transmission of zoonotic diseases, you should always wash your hands before and after handling your foster animals. When necessary, you should also change your clothes and wash all bedding, dishes, and toys that come into contact with the animals.

Other illnesses that a foster may encounter:

### Upper respiratory infection

Infections of the upper respiratory tract (URT) of dogs/cats, including the bronchi, trachea, throat and nasal cavities, are fairly common. Puppies/kittens, unvaccinated animals, elderly dogs/cats and those with impaired immune systems have an increased risk of developing these infections. The most common causes of canine/feline upper-respiratory tract infections are bacteria and viruses. These pathogens are highly contagious, especially when dogs/cats get together in high-density situations such as pet stores and animal shelters.

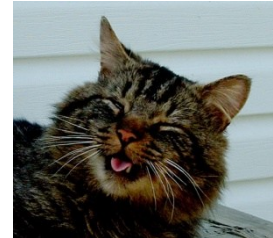
The classic signs of upper respiratory tract infections in dogs and cats are very similar to those of the common cold in people. Infected dogs and cats develop a cough, nasal irritation, sneezing, have a runny nose and may have nose bleeds. They may paw and rub at their face and develop a low-grade fever, runny or matted eyes, breathing difficulties, exercise intolerance, lethargy and anorexia.



## What Are the General Symptoms of Upper respiratory Infections?

Symptoms differ depending on the cause and location of the infection, but some common clinical signs of upper respiratory problems in cats/dogs may include:

- 🐾 Sneezing
- 🐾 Congestion
- 🐾 Runny nose
- 🐾 Cough
- 🐾 Clear to colored nasal and eye discharge
- 🐾 Gagging, drooling
- 🐾 Fever
- 🐾 Loss of or decreased appetite
- 🐾 Rapid breathing
- 🐾 Nasal and oral ulcers
- 🐾 Squinting or rubbing eyes
- 🐾 Open-mouth breathing
- 🐾 Depression
- 🐾 Runny eyes



Treatment may be available depending on many factors including age, pre-existing conditions, animal's overall health, and if the animal received medical attention in a timely manner. (within 24 - 48 hours of first onset of symptoms)

## Parvovirus in cats

Feline pan leukopenia virus (FPV), also known as Feline infectious enteritis, Feline distemper, feline ataxia, or cat plague, is a viral infection affecting cats, both domesticated and wild feline species. It is caused by feline parvovirus, a close relative of both type 2 canine parvovirus and mink enteritis.

Once contracted, parvovirus is highly contagious and can be fatal to the affected cat. The name, pan leukopenia, comes from the low white blood cell count (leucocytes) exhibited by affected animals. Pan leukopenia is primarily spread through contact with an infected animal's bodily fluids, feces, or other fomites, as well as by fleas. It may be spread to and by cats, minks and ferrets and can be spread long distances through contact with bedding, food dishes, or even by clothing and shoes of handlers of infected animals. It is not, however, contagious or contractible by humans. Like all parvoviruses, FPV is extremely resistant to inactivation and can survive for longer than one year in a suitable environment.

#### Signs to look for

- |                           |                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 🐾 bloody diarrhea         | 🐾 lethargy                      | 🐾 foamy diarrhea                |
| 🐾 vomiting                | 🐾 anorexia                      | 🐾 fever                         |
| 🐾 change in eating habits | 🐾 change in activity and energy | 🐾 acute and extreme dehydration |

#### Ringworm

Although the name suggests otherwise, ringworm isn't caused by a worm at all—but a fungus that can infect the skin, hair and nails. Not uncommon in cats/dogs, this highly contagious disease can lead to patchy, circular areas of hair loss with central red rings. Also known as dermatophytosis, ringworm often spreads to other pets in the household - and to humans; usually children, elderly, and immune compromised. Ringworm is usually more common in cats than in dogs.

#### General Symptoms of Ringworm

Classic symptoms of ringworm in cats and dogs include skin lesions that typically appear on the head, ears and forelimbs. Ringworm can cause flaky bald patches that sometimes look red in the center. In mild cases, there may be localized areas of redness or simply dandruff, while more severe infections can spread over a cat or dog's entire body. It is also possible for a pet to carry ringworm spores and not show any symptoms whatsoever.

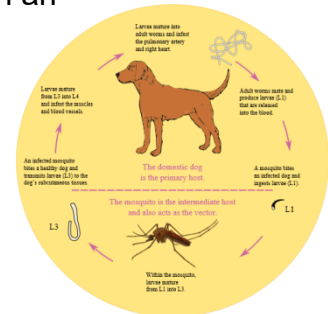
## Mange

Mange is a skin disease caused by several species of tiny mites, common external parasites found in companion canines/felines. Some mange mites are normal residents of your dog's/cat's skin and hair follicles, while others are not. All mites can cause mild to severe skin infections if they proliferate.



## Intestinal Parasites

- 🐾 Roundworms are the most common internal parasites. Resembling spaghetti, adult worms are three to four inches long. There are several ways animals can become infected. Nursing animals can get roundworms from an infected mother's milk, while adults can acquire them by ingesting them.
- 🐾 Hookworms are much smaller than roundworms—less than an inch long—and reside primarily in the small intestine. Because they feed on an animal's blood, hookworms can cause life-threatening anemia, especially in puppies/kittens. Hookworm eggs are passed in the stool and hatch into larvae, and an animal can become infected either through ingestion or skin contact. Please note, hookworms are more common in dogs than in cats.
- 🐾 Tapeworms, long and flat, are segmented parasites and range from 4 to 28 inches in length. An infestation can cause vomiting or weight loss. Animals acquire tapeworms by ingestion, of an infected flea. When animals are infected, tapeworm segments—actual pieces of the worm that resemble grains of rice—can often be seen on the fur around the animal's hind end.
- 🐾 Heartworms are a parasitic roundworm that is spread from host to host through the bites of mosquitoes.
- 🐾 The parasite is commonly called "heartworm"; however, that is a misnomer because the adults actually reside in the pulmonary arterial system (lung

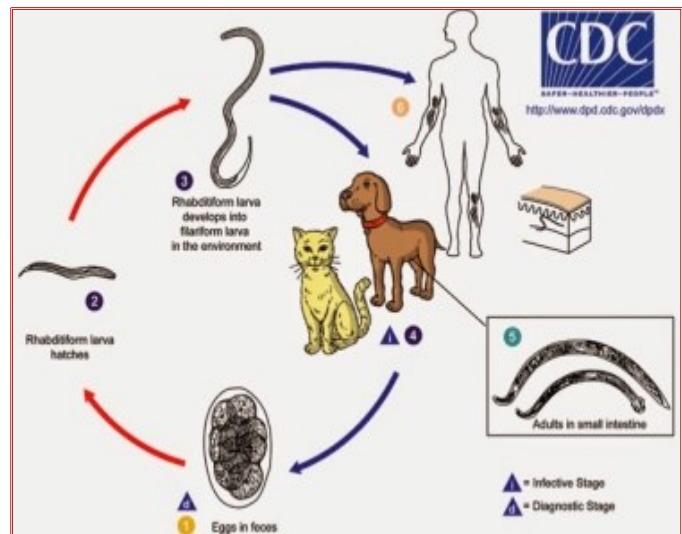


arteries) for the most part, and the primary effect on the health of the animal is a manifestation of damage to the lung vessels and tissues. Occasionally, adult heartworms migrate to the right heart and even the great veins in heavy infections. Acute heartworm disease in cats can result in shock, vomiting, diarrhea, fainting, and sudden death. Chronic infection can cause loss of appetite, weight loss, lethargy, exercise intolerance, coughing, and difficulty breathing.

## Symptoms of Intestinal Parasites (Worms)

Symptoms differ depending on the type of parasite and the location of infection, but some common clinical signs include:

- 🐾 Diarrhea
- 🐾 Worms visible in stool or segments of worm seen near anus
- 🐾 Bloody stool
- 🐾 Bloating or round appearance to abdomen
- 🐾 Weight loss
- 🐾 Vomiting
- 🐾 Constipation
- 🐾 Coughing
- 🐾 Trouble breathing
- 🐾 Dull coat



## Health warning signs!

The following are warning signs that your fostered animal may have medical issues that need immediate attention. Please contact the shelter by phone immediately if any of these symptoms are present:

- |                    |                        |                   |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 🐾 lack of appetite | 🐾 difficulty breathing | 🐾 pale gums       |
| 🐾 poor weight gain | 🐾 sneezing             | 🐾 eye discharge   |
| 🐾 vomiting         | 🐾 coughing/ wheezing   | 🐾 nasal discharge |
| 🐾 diarrhea         | 🐾 constant crying      | 🐾 no urine/ stool |

To reach the shelter, call 407-742-8000 and ask to speak with a vet tech regarding the health of your foster animal. If outside of normal operating hours, you will need to call the on-call vet tech cell phone, 407-908-3388; emergencies only.