

Foster Office: (303) 751-5772 Ext 7290

Foster Emergency Line: (720) 334-1422

What to Expect When Your Foster Cat is Expecting

The average length of gestation for a cat is 63-65 days, with a reported range of 52-74 days. At the Dumb Friends League, you can expect that your foster cat will be around 2/3 of the way through her pregnancy by the time she arrives in your home. This means that by the time she gets to your house, she will have about 2-3 weeks before she goes into labor. She will likely be visibly pregnant (distended abdomen, developed mammary glands) and will have had an exam and x-rays to confirm the presence of fetuses. The Foster Department will let you know how many kittens your foster cat is expected to deliver. Normally, nature takes its course and cats can deliver their kittens without any intervention. However, dystocia (difficulty with birth) does happen and it is important to know signs of a potential emergency so that the medical team can intervene if necessary.

Housing/Queening box

When you take your foster cat home, please take some time to orient her to her new surroundings. It is important to provide her with a quiet room and queening box that she can use to deliver her kittens when she is ready. She can also use this space for nursing her kittens after they are delivered. The box should be easy to clean and lined with soft blankets. Do not use material that kittens could get caught or lost in such as small or torn blankets or shredded paper. Even though you provide a queening box, your foster cat may choose another area of your house to give birth. As long as the location is a safe one, please refrain from moving your cat to another place once the labor process begins. During delivery of kittens, newspapers may be used to line the box and keep it dry. Do not use strong smelling cleaners in the delivery area, as the mother and offspring identify each other by smell. Do not allow the queen to have the kittens in the litter box, as that increases the likelihood of disease. Privacy, cleanliness, dryness, and warmth are needed for an ideal queening location. Once she is finished, the entire box should be cleaned and lined with a clean blanket. You can move her to a more suitable area once all kittens have been delivered and are starting to nurse.

Diet

During this time, it is important that your foster cat is fed a high-quality diet and be fed about 25% more than she is normally fed. While nursing, she will require about three times the amount she is normally fed (depending on the number of kittens she is nursing). A high calorie growth/kitten diet is best for nursing cats. The foster coordinators can help you to determine the amount and type of food you should be feeding your foster cat. Your foster cat should have access to plenty of water at all time, but during and after birth this must be safely out of kittens' reach to minimize the risk of accidental drowning. It is not recommend to give additional vitamins or supplements unless directed by a DFL veterinarian.

Foster Office: (303) 751-5772 Ext 7290

Foster Emergency Line: (720) 334-1422

Isolation

Please isolate your pregnant foster cat from other cats during her pregnancy and while nursing to help prevent disease transmission.

Labor

Once your foster cat is ready to give birth, she will go through several stages of labor.

Stage 1: During the first stage of labor, uterine contractions begin though you may not be able to notice them. You may notice your foster cat acting restless, making repeated visits to the kitting bed, scratching, and some cats may begin to pant. Pregnant cats usually stop eating during the last twenty-four hours before labor, and with many cats having their first litter, this first stage of labor can last up to thirty- six hours.

Stage 2 and 3: During these stages of labor, the uterine muscle begins stronger and more frequent contractions. Kittens are usually born between 10-60 minutes apart. A greenish/black vaginal discharge is sometimes passed between kittens.

- You can check on your foster cat during the birthing process, but try not to disturb her as this can delay labor and birth.
- If a kitten is visible in the birth canal and appears stuck for more than 10 minutes in the birth canal, please call the foster department for further instructions. Do not forcibly attempt to remove a kitten from the birth canal.
- Do not assist delivery by pulling on the head of a kitten or on the umbilical cord as it exits the mother.
- Do not put your fingers in the birth canal as you can cause trauma or infection.
- **If notice that your foster cat appears to have an excessive amount of bright red blood from her vulva, is actively straining for more than 30 minutes without the passage of a kitten, or if she appears to be lethargic or depressed, please contact the Foster Department as your foster cat will need an examination from a veterinarian.**

Neonatal Kitten Care

- Kittens are born with a thin membrane covering their face and body. As each kitten is born, the mother will tear open the membranes and clear the mouth and nose area of the kitten, bite off the umbilical cord, and subsequently eat the placenta or “afterbirth.” If she has not done so within 1 minute of birth, you can gently remove the membrane yourself and then begin rubbing the kitten with a dry towel to help stimulate breathing.

Foster Office: (303) 751-5772 Ext 7290

Foster Emergency Line: (720) 334-1422

- Some kittens may have a small amount of clear fluid coming from their mouths and nostrils. If a kitten is struggling to breathe, a pediatric suction bulb can be used to gently clear away the fluid. It is important to never swing the kitten to get rid of this fluid.
- If the umbilical cord has not broken on delivery, tear it an inch from the kitten and remove the bulk of the membranes. Complicated cutting and tying of the cord are unnecessary. The queen would chew through it, providing a blunt crushing action to prevent bleeding; you can do the same thing by tearing it between your first two fingers and thumb.
- Never use a heating pad or external heating device on a medium or high setting; kittens have trouble regulating their body temperature and can easily overheat.
- It is not uncommon for some kittens to be stillborn or to die shortly after birth. If a kitten passes away, please place it in a plastic bag and bring it to the Dumb Friends League.

Post-partum Care

What to do after birth: If your foster cat is nursing her kittens well and if all kittens are accounted for (if the number of kittens birthed matches the number of kittens suspected on pre-birth x-rays), you can let her rest and nurse her kittens. Please ensure that the mother is being fed about 2-3 times her normal diet in order to produce enough milk for her kittens.

- All kittens must receive a dewormer at 2 weeks old
- All kittens must receive their first set of vaccines at 4 weeks old, and then boosted every two weeks after that.

Vaginal Discharge: Reddish brown vaginal discharge from the mother can continue for several days after a normal birth. If the mother is eating normally and is active, this isn't a problem. If she becomes lethargic, stops eating or begins to act sick, or if you notice a foul smell to the discharge, please call the Foster Department to schedule an appointment.

Mastitis: Mastitis occurs when there is inflammation of a mammary gland. The affected gland will be firm, hot, painful, and enlarged. If an infection is present, in addition to pain and swelling in the gland, there may be a colored discharge from the nipple and the cat will have appetite loss (anorexia), be lethargic, and feverish. **If any of these signs are noted, please call the foster department immediately.**

Eclampsia or "milk fever": In cats, eclampsia may occur three to five weeks after the birth of kittens and is due to a sudden drop in the amount of calcium circulating in the bloodstream, associated with the heavy demands of milk production. This is more common in cats nursing a large litter. The first signs of eclampsia include restlessness, panting, muscle tremors, and incoordination. It can progress to rigid, stiff-legged muscular spasms, followed by convulsions or coma. **If any of these signs are noted, please call the foster department immediately.**

Foster Office: (303) 751-5772 Ext 7290

Foster Emergency Line: (720) 334-1422

Thank you for fostering for the Dumb Friends League!

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Foster Department at 303-751-5772 ext 7290.

Emergency # 303-696-0063