



## Snot Squad 2021

Manual for Kitten Foster Volunteers



**San Jose Animal Care Center**

2750 Monterey Rd, San Jose, CA 95111

For questions about the foster program or your kitten contact the SJACC foster staff:

[sjkitten@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:sjkitten@sanjoseca.gov) or (408) 398-7859

**In the event of an emergency, call 408-464-1312 or 408-643-4405**



A digital copy of this manual is available at [www.kittensfirst.org](http://www.kittensfirst.org)

Instructional videos are on the Kittens First YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzCh487fHJ4LIL7JuGOIBaw>

## Welcome to the Snot Squad!

The Snot Squad is a medical foster program which treats kittens that have upper respiratory tract infections (URI).

### ***Learning objectives***

After reading this manual and reviewing videos online, volunteers should know:

- What causes a URI
- How URIs are transmitted
- What are the common signs of a URI
- How to treat a URI, including:
  - How to give eye and oral medications
  - How to nebulize or give steam treatments
- How to monitor treatment progress
- When to schedule a follow-up visit
- How to isolate sick kittens
- How to disinfect enclosures

## What causes a URI

A URI is a “kitty cold”. URIs are caused by viruses and bacteria, such as:

- Herpesvirus
- Calicivirus
- Mycoplasma
- Chlamydophila

Often, a cat will have multiple infections at once. We are unable to determine the cause of an individual cat’s infection, due both to the cost of testing, and because treatment for all the most common causes is similar.

We assume 90% of the time URI is caused by herpesvirus, so we treat it supportively and provide antibiotics if we think there are bacteria present.

Herpes is activated by many sources of stress or illness, such as:

- Weaning
- Pregnancy, birth
- Poor nutrition
- Parasites
- Coming to the shelter or going into a new home
- Perceived social danger (fighting with other animals)

## Transmission of URIs

URIs are spread by direct contact between cats, as their sneezes and discharge contain the viruses and bacteria. A URI can also be spread by clothes, hands, or anything contaminated by the discharge from their eyes or nose (boogers, sneezes).

Almost all kittens get herpesvirus from their mother. When her herpesvirus is active due to stress from pregnancy and birth, she passes it on to her kittens, who then become sick.

## Effect of URIs

Herpesvirus lives in the mouth, nose, and eyes of a cat, causing damage to cells and leading to signs of a “head cold”:

- Eye discharge
- Conjunctivitis (red and swollen eyes and eyelids)
- Ulceration of the mouth, tongue, nose, or eyes
- Sneezing
- Nasal discharge and congestion

Severe infection and pain from ulcers can lead to a poor appetite, weight loss, lethargy, and dehydration.

When a kitten’s immune system is overwhelmed, a URI can sometimes turn from a “head cold” into a “chest cold”. Unfortunately, pneumonia in shelter kittens is quite common, but can be treated with aggressive antibiotic therapy.

## URI Treatment

Basic treatment for any kitty illness is based on good supportive care (food, heat, cleanliness) and monitoring. Drugs will be prescribed as needed by staff, but time and TLC will do much of the work!

### ***1. Create a healing environment***

Kittens need time and a place to rest and recover when they are sick. We recommend making sure that the enclosure is (1) warm, (2) humid, (3) quiet, and (4) low stress.

Check to see if your kitten is sleeping on their heating pad curled up, which may suggest that they are too cold, or stretched out fully and breathing fast, meaning that they are possibly too hot.

If your kitten is in a playpen, cover it with a towel to help keep the humidity inside.

Use your best judgement to balance their socialization needs versus their need to sleep and be undisturbed. Sick kittens will sleep more than healthy kittens, so they may be happier in a quiet

bathroom that gets infrequent visitors than in a loud living room where the TV is going all the time.

## **2. Keep eyes and nose clean**

Use a warm, wet washcloth, wet wipe, or cotton pad to remove discharge from the eyes and nose twice a day or as needed.

Gently wipe from either corner of the eye to remove all debris. The virus builds up in the discharge and can lead to reinfection, so keep your kitten as clean as possible, and wash your hands thoroughly before and after.

## **3. Eye medication**

If you have been prescribed eye ointment (Terramycin, erythromycin) or eye drops (tobramycin), administer them as directed on the label.

Most eye ointments are prescribed to be given every 8-12 hours. However, your goal is to always have meds in the kitten's eye. If you notice that the eye looks like it could use more medication, go ahead and give another dose. It's impossible to overdo eye medications! For example, after wiping your kitten's eyes to remove discharge, reapply eye ointment, even if it's the middle of the day.

To administer eye medication, use one of the following techniques:

- Wash your hands and put eye ointment on your clean finger or a Q tip. Alternatively, you can apply directly from the tube by squeezing out a small amount, so it dangles a bit.
- Wrap kitten in a towel and/or hold securely so you can control their head
- Hold the eye open with your other hand and smear the ointment into the eye. Help the kitten blink to move eye ointment around.

*See instructional video on YouTube for examples of administering eye meds.*

Return old eye ointments or drops to the shelter or hold onto them for next time. If you hold onto eye meds, wipe the bottle and tips with Rescue wipes and rinse with a clean, damp rag after 10 mins before using on another litter.

## **4. Oral antibiotics**

If your kitten has been prescribed oral antibiotics (azithromycin, Clavamox), administer them as directed on the label. Whenever giving any antibiotic, be sure to:

1. Store in refrigerator
2. Shake bottle well before giving
3. Give a meal or snack before giving medication
4. Complete the entire course of medication - even if kitty seems better - unless instructed to do otherwise

To administer oral medication, use the following technique:

1. Draw up medication in a clean syringe
2. Wrap kitten in a towel and/or hold securely so you can control their head
3. Put the syringe into the side of the mouth where there are no teeth and then pointing the syringe towards the back of the mouth
4. Gently and steadily depress the plunger until kitten has received the full dose
5. Wash the dirty syringe
  - a. Pull apart the syringe plunger and tube
  - b. Wash each piece with soap and warm water
  - c. Rinse and dry before putting back together
  - d. Reuse syringes until the plunger starts to be hard to push
  - e. Do not reuse syringes between litters

*See instructional video on YouTube for examples of administering oral meds.*

## **5. Nebulization and steam treatment**

For kittens that are congested, nebulization or steam treatment can help them recover more quickly.

You can buy a nebulizer for \$50-70 online (optional). A nebulizer converts water into a mist which helps moisten hardened discharge in the nose or sinuses. Set up a nebulizer box or nebulize kittens in their carrier/cage and nebulize using sterile water two to three times a day for 5-10 minutes each time. [If not already in use, it is okay to drape a towel over the carrier/cage to maintain the humid environment for the duration of nebulizer treatment.]

If you do not want to buy a nebulizer, then you can put the kitten in a bathroom during a hot shower so they can breathe in the warm, steamy air. Do not place kittens IN the shower. Alternatively, you can run an electric tea kettle a few times in the bathroom with the door closed to create some steam.

You can also create a steamy kitten sauna by putting kittens in a carrier near a bowl of hot water and covering them with a towel to absorb steam. Take care to avoid getting the kitten's face into the bowl. Leave part of the carrier uncovered

*See instructional videos on YouTube for examples of nebulization and steam treatment*

Finally, if you have one, you can run a humidifier (ideally on warm mist mode) in the room where the kitten sleeps to help keep the air moist. Do not add any essential oils or medications to the humidifier, as these can be toxic or irritating to cats.

## 6. Fluids

If your kitten is dehydrated, lethargic, or not gaining weight, then you may be prescribed subcutaneous fluids (SQF). SQF are administered under the skin in the scruff of the neck. If you are uncomfortable doing this, inform a staff member.

*See instructional videos on YouTube for examples of giving subcutaneous fluids*

To administer subcutaneous medication, use the following technique:

1. Draw up prescribed dose of fluids in a sterile syringe using an 18 or 20G needle, then
2. Change needle to a 23 or 25G butterfly catheter (needle with tubing)
3. Put your kitten in their carrier or on the ground in an enclosed space
4. Tent the scruff of the kitten with your non-dominant hand
  - a. Be prepared to grab the kitten and prevent them from jumping and hurting themselves, but you do not need to hold them tight
5. Insert the butterfly catheter into tented skin
  - a. If you miss and go out the other side, drop the tent and pull the needle back slightly until it is in the “tented area”
  - b. If you are completely out, re-tent the kitten’s neck scruff and start again. You can use your needle for 3 pokes before it’ll become too dull to use. Change your needle if you miss 3 times before trying again
6. Drop the tented scruff and pet the kitten’s head
7. Inject the fluids slowly at first by pressing on the plunger
  - a. If the kitten reacts, stop and pet them, allow them to relax, then continue administering
8. After the first 1-2 mL has been injected, you can inject the remaining volume more quickly.
  - a. Continue to pet the kitten
9. Pull out the needle and dispose of the needle in your sharps container

## Monitoring

In addition to monitoring your kitten’s weight, bowel movements, and appetite, also monitor:

- Eye discharge: color (clear, crusty, green), amount (mild, moderate), and if it is in one or both eyes
- Nose discharge: color, amount, thickness
- Breathing rate and effort: 30-60 breaths per minute, effort in should be equal to effort out
  - Write down their respiratory rate while they are sleeping every day and see if there is a trend. Breathing that is getting faster every day can indicate trouble breathing and pneumonia
- Activity level: If your kitten seems lethargic or less active, this can be a sign of dehydration or worsening illness

- Corneal surface: The eyeball itself should always be smooth and transparent (so you can see the colored part of the eye. If you notice any abnormalities to the eyeball, such as bleeding, cloudiness, lumpiness, irregularity, or anything unusual, this could be a sign of corneal ulceration

## Follow up appointments

- Schedule a telemedicine consult 24 hours after your initial appointment to make sure your kitten is improving
  - You may be directed to return to the shelter for a follow up appointment or to pick up more medication
- You may schedule additional video rechecks consults as often as you want if you have questions or concerns about your kitten's treatment, progress
- You should expect significant improvement in the first 72 hours of starting treatment (less discharge, more active, more weight gain, etc.) **If your kitten does not significantly improve**, or develops new signs of illness, then schedule a video recheck ASAP
- You do not need to return to the shelter for a "routine recheck"

## Emergency medical concerns

The following are examples of when you need to make an in-person appointment:

- Discharge from eyes or nose was clear, and now is yellow or green
- Kitten's breathing has gotten faster, or kitten has increased effort to breathe
- The eyeball now looks irregular, red, cloudy, lumpy, or otherwise abnormal
- Kitten develops new signs of URI, such as
  - Eye discharge
  - Conjunctivitis (red and swollen eyes and eyelids)
  - Ulceration of the mouth, tongue, nose, or eyes
  - Nasal discharge and congestion

In addition, use the same guidelines as in your regular foster manual for when to contact shelter staff:

### ***Emergency medical concerns***

Call shelter immediately for:

- Bleeding of any kind (from the nose, mouth, ears, or in the urine or stool)
- Any trauma (dropped, limping, stepped on, bit by dog)
- Difficulty (open mouth) breathing, gasping
- Diarrhea for two 2 bowel movements in a row
- Diarrhea lasting more than 3 or 4 feedings
- Lack of appetite
- Lethargy (lack of energy)
- Vomiting
- Weight loss or not gaining weight

- No bowel movement for 36 hours

### ***Non-urgent medical concerns***

Should be seen within 48 hours

- Watery eyes or nose, sneezing
- Hair loss
- Itchy skin or ears

## **Isolation of sick kittens**

You do not need to strictly isolate your kittens with URI, unless directed to do so by shelter staff, since URI is not usually contagious to other cats.

Your cats probably already have herpesvirus, and your kittens cannot infect them again. However, because herpes is reactivated by stress, if your cat is stressed by having foster kittens in the home, their own herpesvirus may reactivate, and your own cat may develop a URI.

Some types of URI, like calicivirus, are contagious to your other cats, so use your discretion if you'd like to isolate your URI kittens or not. Calicivirus usually shows up as kittens limping, having a high fever, not eating, and having low energy. This is much less common than herpesvirus, and tends to be obvious, which is why you do not need to isolate your kittens unless there are signs of calicivirus.

Use the same guidelines described in the foster manual for quarantine of kittens (separate room, separate supplies, wash hands/wear gloves, keep separate from your pets) for the first 14 days.

## **Disinfection**

Most URI viruses and bacterial infections are easily disinfected with standard cleaning/disinfection protocol. See your foster manual for complete instructions.