



The Merrimack River
Feline Rescue Society

Caring for Cats in Need

FOSTER CARE GUIDELINES

updated May 2012

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We ask all of our foster care providers to join the MRFRS Foster Homes Network Yahoo! Group by visiting <http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/mrfrsfosterhomesnetwork/> and clicking on Join This Group! or by emailing an MRFRS staff member and requesting that an invitation be sent to you by email.

This group is a great way to network with other foster homes, many of whom have years of wonderful experience that they are more than willing to share! There are also places to post photos of foster cats, download copies of these guidelines, contact lists, and access links to useful information!

PLEASE JOIN TODAY!

FOSTERING WITH THE MERRIMACK RIVER FELINE RESCUE SOCIETY

MRFRS relies on our wonderful network of foster homes to expand the number of cats we are able to help each year. Without our foster homes, we would have to turn away many cats and kittens, and so we consider our foster care network an absolutely vital part of our ability to care for cats in need.

Generally speaking, there are two reasons a cat or kitten will be placed in foster care:

1. the cat/kitten is not currently ready for adoption due to health issues, spay/neuter status, age, or behavioral concerns
2. we don't have room to take the cat/kitten into the shelter at the current time

Your responsibilities as a foster home include:

- providing us with a volunteer application & release, foster home questionnaire, and signed foster agreement
- ensuring that all animals in your home are up-to-date on vaccinations and spayed/neutered
- keeping foster animals separate from your own animals, unless previously discussed with MRFRS staff
- tending to the foster cat's basic needs
- providing a safe and loving indoor environment
- communicating with MRFRS staff regarding health and behavioral concerns
- medicating cats as needed & keeping records of meds
- bringing cats to MRFRS for vaccine updates, weight checks, spay or neuter surgery, etc.
- giving the MRFRS staff a feel for each cat's personality, likes, dislikes, etc.
- returning the cat to MRFRS when requested

Our responsibilities include:

- providing supplies for you if you wish to take them (including food, litter, litter pans/scoops, cage, bedding, toys, medications)
- providing all health care services for the cat (including vaccinations, blood tests, spay/neuter, microchipping, etc.)

ADOPTING A FOSTER CAT

We are always delighted when one of our foster placements turns into a permanent home for that cat or kitten. **We do ask our foster homes to pay an adoption fee** of \$200 for kittens, \$125 for adults, and \$50 for senior or special needs cats. We offer a \$25 discount off the second kitten or regular adult cat. *These adoption fees allow us to provide medical care not only for your foster cat, but for every cat who comes through our door – whether that cat comes and goes in a matter of days and incurs minimal expenses, or whether that cat stays with us for years and racks up many hundreds or thousands of dollars of medical expenses. In short, adoption fees give every cat who enters our system a chance at a better life.*

FRIENDS/FAMILY ADOPTING A FOSTER CAT

During the time you have your foster cat/kitten, it is likely that a friend or family member will meet the cat, and may end up wanting to adopt him/her. The adoption process is the same for a friend or family member as it is for anyone.

First, we must have a completed adoption application (available at MRFRS or on our website) from the potential adopter. Next, we must receive a \$25 deposit (cash, check or Visa/MasterCard) from the adopter to place the cat on hold. This deposit is applied towards the adoption fee.

Until we receive this deposit, the cat is still considered to be available to other potential adopters and MRFRS adoption staff may tell other adopters about the cat/kitten.

If the adoption application is approved, the adopter may complete adoption paperwork and take the cat home *only after spay/neuter surgery is complete*. On rare occasions when we deny an adoption application, we will refund the \$25 deposit.

Please note that we do not generally put cats in foster on hold *at all*, especially kittens, but we do make an exception to this policy for friends/family members of foster homes.

Please note that all foster cats remain the legal property of MRFRS and are considered to be in the custody of MRFRS until adoption paperwork is completed.

TYPES OF FOSTER CARE SITUATIONS

- bottle babies: kittens between birth and 5-6 weeks old who normally would still be nursing from a mother cat (*please note that bottle babies are very labor intensive and require feeding every 2 hours, 24 hours a day during early weeks – they are not for everyone!*)
- kittens and/or mom cats with kittens: kittens need to stay in a foster home environment until they are weaned, weigh enough and are healthy enough for spay/ neuter and adoption; kittens also do not have a well- developed immune system, so we prefer to keep them out of the shelter until at least 8 weeks of age
- feral kittens: young kittens who are born outside without human contact need to be socialized to life with people – this takes patience and skill, but is a very rewarding foster experience!
- sick cats/kittens: kitties get better so much faster outside of the shelter environment, so it is wonderful to be able to send them into foster care to recover
- injured or post-surgery cats: occasionally we have cats or kittens who need a quiet place to recover from a serious injury or major surgery (*these cats often have significant medical needs, so we are always in need of people with a willingness to learn to care for these types of cats*)
- rabies quarantine fosters: under MA law, any cat with an unknown rabies vaccination status who presents with a “wound of unknown origin” must be quarantined away from other animals for 6 mos. **These are the hardest cats to find placement for.** Ask for more info.
- semi-social/behaviorally challenged adults and older kittens: we sometimes have older kittens or adult cats who have experienced mistreatment, or who just aren’t used to being around people, and we are always in need of people willing to work with these kitties to help them learn to adjust to life around humans
- hospice care: sadly, we do take in kitties who may be nearing the end of their life. Our preference is for them to spend their last weeks or months in a home environment rather than a shelter, with the full medical support of MRFRS.
- other opportunities: sometimes we have cats who just need a break from shelter life, or cats who need a place to stay for a few months while their owners get back on their feet, or cats with Feline Leukemia who need a very special place to stay for a week, a month, or maybe forever!

HEALTH CARE FOR FOSTER CATS

MRFRS VETERINARIANS

MRFRS has accounts with these vets. **In all but extreme emergency situations, appointments will need to be booked by MRFRS staff** in order to be billed to MRFRS and to receive our shelter discount. ***We may require you to pay for appointments not booked according to our guidelines.***

Veterinary Emergency & Critical Care Center of NH

603-431-3600 ~ 15 Piscataqua Drive, Portsmouth, NH
OPEN 24 HOURS, 7 DAYS A WEEK

***THIS IS OUR PREFERRED EMERGENCY VET!!**

Essex County Emergency & Referral Hospital

978-725-5544 ~ 247 Chickering Road, North Andover, MA
OPEN 24 HOURS, 7 DAYS A WEEK

Newbury Animal Hospital

97 Hanover Street, Newbury MA ~ 978-465-2777

The Feline Hospital

81 Webb Street, Salem, MA ~ 978-744-8020

GENERAL NOTES ON VET CARE:

- **routine vet care (check-ups, vaccinations, blood tests, etc.) will almost always be done either by shelter staff or by our shelter vet at MRFRS**
- **spay/neuter will almost always be done by our shelter vet on the Catmobile** mobile spay/neuter clinic, usually in Salisbury, but you may be able to bring cats to an alternate location
- if you do see an external vet, **please check with MRFRS staff before taking any medications from that vet** – we almost always have the same medications at the shelter, and it is MUCH, MUCH less expensive for us to dispense them from here

TREATMENTS EVERY CAT MUST RECEIVE BEFORE ADOPTION:

- minimum of one FVRCP (distemper) vaccination (starting at 4-6 wks. of age, boosted every 2 weeks until sixteen weeks of age for kittens, boosted once 3 weeks later for adults)
- rabies vaccination (done at 12 wks. or older – determined by vet by weight)
- physical exam by a veterinarian
- flea treatment & deworming
- FeLV (Feline Leukemia) test for kittens under 6 mos.; FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus)/FeLV test for cats and kittens older than 6 mos.
- spay or neuter (done at 8 wks/2.2 lbs. or later)
- microchip

SOME MEDICAL CONDITIONS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER

- upper respiratory illness (URI): very common “kitty cold” that many shelter cats develop; symptoms include nasal and eye discharge, sneezing, congestion, lethargy and lack of interest in eating; we will usually provide an antibiotic to ward off secondary infections; generally clears up on its own, but more than a few days of not eating may require supportive care (sub-Q fluids, force feeding)
- calici virus: common, but potentially serious disease often seen in shelter cats; symptoms include drooling, lesions on tongue/gums and/or on nose, bloody mouth or nose, high fever, lack of interest in eating; treatment is similar to URI, but also requires 30 days of quarantine away from other cats after diagnosis; in kittens, only symptom may be limping/lameness
- ringworm: NOT a worm, but rather a fungus that causes skin lesions; transmissible to humans as well as other animals; treated in animals with topical and internal medications (more easily treated in humans); spores can live in the environment for up to a year, so bleach must be used to disinfect
- ear mites: common in cats who were living outside; symptoms include severe itching, head shaking, “coffee ground”-like debris in ears; treated with either a 14-day course of Tresaderm or a dose or two of Ivomec
- fleas & ticks: also common in cats living outside; all cats entering our shelter are treated upon intake for fleas, but treatment can take up to 24 hours to kill all fleas, and may not be 100% effective; we recommend treating your own animals regularly
- intestinal parasites: common in outdoor cats; symptoms include diarrhea, “potbellied” look, and presence of worms in vomit or stool; tapeworm segments look like small grains of rice, roundworms look like spaghetti; treatment depends on the type of parasite; coccidia is another parasite, particularly common in kittens, which can cause especially odiferous diarrhea and must be treated promptly

GENERAL SANITATION PROTOCOLS

All of the above diseases/conditions/parasites are contagious to other cats (and some are contagious to dogs and humans as well). **In general, you should make it common practice to wash your hands before and after handling your foster cats.** You should also use separate food & water dishes and litter boxes, and you may want to consider having an overshirt that you wear while spending time with your foster cat, particularly if they are very young, or if you have an older or weak cat of your own. You may also want to consider keeping foster cats/kittens in a cage or bathroom that is easily disinfectable.

BASIC CAT HEALTH INFO:

normal adult body temperature: 100.5°- 102.5°

normal respiratory rate: 16-40 breaths per minute

normal heart rate: 120-140 beats per minute
(kittens: 200-260)

normal duration of feline pregnancy: 63 days

normal weight of kittens at birth: ~100 grams (=3.53 oz.)

BASIC HEALTH CARE/FIRST AID ITEMS TO HAVE ON HAND:

- digital rectal thermometer & lubricant
- alcohol
- triple antibiotic ointment (WITHOUT pain reliever)
- gauze pads & adhesive tape
- saline (contact lens solution or nasal solution)
- heating pad (especially for kittens)
- tweezers
- kitchen scale
- a good book on cat health (like *The Cat Owner's Home Veterinary Handbook* by D.G. Carlson & J.M. Giffin)

Most of these items can be borrowed from MRFRS – please see a staff member to sign out a “foster home kit.” You are welcome to keep the kit for as long as you need it, but please do make sure that any durable supplies are returned to MRFRS when you are no longer using them.

OTHER SUPPLIES:

You are always welcome to take food, litter, litter boxes, scoops, bedding, toys, etc. from MRFRS. Cages and carriers are also available to borrow. Again, durable supplies should be returned to MRFRS when they are no longer needed, and cages must be signed out in our supply sign out book.

When you need supplies, please check in at the front desk at MRFRS and a staff member will go downstairs and get what you need. Please refrain from going downstairs to get supplies yourself; this is a staff-only area. Your cooperation is appreciated!

A WORD ABOUT CAT BITES

IF YOU ARE BITTEN BY A FOSTER CAT, you must report the bite to the foster home coordinator or MRFRS medical staff *immediately*. Massachusetts has very strict laws regarding bite quarantines, even for vaccinated cats, that must be followed. These laws exist for your health and safety and we take them seriously.

In addition, even seemingly minor cat bites can become infected *very quickly*. Cats' mouths harbor the bacteria *Pasteurella*, which causes infection in about 70% of bite wounds. Wash any bite immediately with hot water and soap and allow it to bleed for a bit if possible. *Do not cover* the bite, and keep a close eye on it. If it becomes red, swollen, warm, or if you develop a red line across your skin, **seek medical treatment right away**. You will most likely need an antibiotic. You will most likely *not* need rabies post-exposure vaccination, but consult with your doctor and MRFRS medical staff for advice.

If you plan to work with cats, particularly stray or feral cats/kittens, on a regular basis, you may want to look into receiving the rabies pre-exposure vaccine series. This is a simple series of three shots given over a 3 month period. While the shots do not eliminate the need for post-exposure treatment, they do simplify and shorten post-exposure treatment. Health insurance will often cover the pre-exposure series.

EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE CONTACT INFO.

MRFRS Salisbury Headquarters: 978-462-0760

**call this number first during shelter open hours
(Tues-Thurs 2-6pm, Fri 2-7pm, Sat 12-5)*

MRFRS emergency on-call cell phone: 978-XXX-XXXX

**call this number if you don't get an answer at the shelter, or if it is outside of shelter open hours, or anytime on a weekend or holiday*

If you don't get an answer on the cell phone, please *leave a detailed message with contact numbers*. If you don't get a call back within 20 min., please call one of these numbers:

NAME	PHONE	E-MAIL
Britney Fox Hover		
Liz Pease		
Amy Moody		
Lauren Weinberger		

****Please call these numbers ONLY if you don't get a return call on the on-call phone, and ONLY in the case of an extreme emergency!***

When you call with an emergency, here are some of the questions we will ask you:

- 1) is the cat/kitten eating? if not, for how long?
- 2) does the cat/kitten seem dehydrated?
- 3) does the cat/kitten have a temperature?
- 4) does the cat/kitten seem lethargic or in pain?
- 5) what other symptoms is the cat/kitten having (vomiting, diarrhea, etc.)

WHAT CONSTITUTES AN EMERGENCY?

Please use your best judgment in determining what constitutes an emergency (and we would always rather be safe than sorry), but in general, the following things *always* count as extreme emergencies:

- acute difficulty breathing
- temperature above 104 or below 99
- obvious fracture or large open wound
- significant bleeding, most vaginal bleeding, any bleeding from eye, nose, or rectum
- *complete* inability to urinate or defecate
- non-stop vomiting or diarrhea
- complications with labor and delivery

See page 6 for a list of vets that we work with. Please note that whenever possible, ***vet care should be arranged through MRFRS, and should be pre-authorized. In a***

life-threatening emergency situation, however, please proceed to a vet immediately, and contact us as soon as possible.

WHAT IS NOT AN EMERGENCY?

Again, please use your best judgment, and try to report symptoms to us *before* they do become an emergency, but the following can *generally* wait until morning or business hours to be reported:

- congestion/nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing
- drooling with red, raw tongue/sores on tongue
- red, irritated eye (with/without discharge)
- small wounds, even if infected (*unless high fever is present!)
- lump or swelling/redness at spay incision site (*unless incision is open, and/or cat is lethargic and has a high fever)
- occasional/once daily vomiting or diarrhea
- decreased appetite (should be reported promptly if it lasts for more than a day)
- straining to urinate or defecate (as long as even small amounts of urine/feces are being produced) – PLEASE REPORT THIS AS SOON AS MRFRS IS OPEN!
- increased urination or appetite
- hair loss or rashes
- worms/intestinal parasites vomited up or seen in stool
- small amounts of blood in stool
- bloody urine (*unless high fever is present)
- lethargy or decreased appetite after vaccination

These things do not constitute emergencies, but should be reported to medical staff promptly so that we can see the cat or advise you to monitor the symptoms.