

Foster Care: What's an Emergency?

This guide is designed to help foster caregivers know **when to seek immediate help** versus **when to contact the foster team during normal hours**. When in doubt, **err on the side of caution**—especially with kittens.

KITTENS (Birth–5 months)

Kittens can decline very quickly. Changes that seem minor can be life-threatening.

EMERGENCY – Contact the foster emergency phone 734-717-4424

- **Lethargy or weakness** (won't get up, limp, collapsing, unable to nurse)
- **Labored breathing** (open-mouth breathing, gasping, blue or pale gums)
- **Seizures**
- **Injuries or trauma** (major falls, stepped on, animal attack)
- **Fever** – temperature >103.5
- **Combination of diarrhea, vomiting, inappetence, weight loss, lethargy**
- **Bloated, painful abdomen** with crying or restlessness

URGENT – Contact the foster team ASAP – fostertech@hshv.org

- **Nasal discharge** - cloudy/colored (yellow, green)
- **Eye discharge** - cloudy/colored (yellow, green), squinting, redness, swelling
- Reduced appetite, weight loss
- Constipation or straining to defecate
- **Diarrhea** – score 5-7 lasting more than 24 hours
- **Not eating** for:
 - 4–6 hours (neonates)
 - 12 hours (older kittens)
- **Repeated vomiting** or vomiting with lethargy
- **Tremors or head tilt**
- **Sudden weight loss** or failure to gain weight over 24 hours (especially neonates)
- **Umbilical swelling, discharge, or redness**
- **Fever** – temperature 102.5-103.5
- **Hypothermia** (low temperature)
 - Normal Rectal Temperature for neonatal kittens
 - 0-1 weeks of age - 95-99 °F
 - 2-3 weeks of age - 97-100 °F
 - 4 weeks of age - 99-101 °F
 - >4 weeks of age - 99.5-102.5 °F

 **MONITOR & REPORT (non-urgent) – fostertech@hshv.org**

- Mild clear eye discharge that improves with cleaning
 - Soft stool once but otherwise bright and eating
 - Mild sneezing without lethargy
 - Soft stools lasting >48 hours
 - Sneezing, clear nasal discharge
 - Skin lesions, hair loss, or signs of ringworm
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DOGS & ADULT CATS

 **EMERGENCY – Contact the foster emergency phone 734-717-4424**

- **Difficulty breathing** or collapse
- **Uncontrolled bleeding** or severe trauma
- **Seizures** (first-time, prolonged, or multiple)
- **Repeated vomiting or diarrhea** with blood, lethargy, inappetence
- **Inability to urinate** or painful straining
- **Sudden paralysis, severe weakness, or extreme pain**
- **Bloat signs in dogs** (restlessness, retching without producing vomit, distended abdomen)
- **Toxin exposure** (medications, plants, chemicals, chocolate, xylitol, etc.)

 **URGENT – Contact foster team same day – fostertech@hshv.org**

- Not eating for 48 hours
- Limping that is worsening or painful
- Eye injuries or squinting
- Wounds, abscesses, or bite marks
- Persistent coughing
- Nasal discharge - cloudy/colored (yellow, green)
- Eye discharge - cloudy/colored (yellow, green), squinting, redness, swelling
- Lack of bowel movement for 4+ days

 **MONITOR & REPORT – fostertech@hshv.org**

- Mild diarrhea more than twice
 - Persistent vomiting, still eating
 - Persistent or bothersome itching or ear scratching
 - Changes in appetite or behavior without other symptoms
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PREGNANT & NURSING MOMS (Dogs & Cats)

Pregnant and nursing animals are at increased risk for rapid complications and should be monitored closely.

EMERGENCY – Contact the foster emergency phone 734-717-4424

- **Prolonged or difficult labor:**
 - Active straining for **>30 minutes** with no puppy/kitten delivered
 - **More than 2 hours** between deliveries when more babies are expected
 - **Green, black, or foul-smelling vaginal discharge** before the first baby
- **Signs of severe distress during labor** (collapse, extreme pain, unproductive straining)
- **Excessive vaginal bleeding** or bleeding that does not slow after delivery
- **Weakness, collapse, tremors, seizures, or inability to stand**
- **Labored breathing** or pale gums
- **Sudden abandonment of babies** or inability to care for them
- **Signs of mastitis** (hot, swollen, painful mammary glands) **with fever or lethargy**

URGENT – Contact the foster team ASAP – fostertech@hshv.org

- **Not eating** or significantly reduced appetite
- **Weakness, lethargy, or reluctance to stand or walk** while nursing
- **Vomiting or diarrhea**
- **Excessive vaginal discharge/bleeding** lasting >48 hours after delivery
- **Decreased milk production** or babies persistently crying or failing to gain weight
- **Mild mastitis** (firm or swollen mammary glands without systemic illness)

MONITOR & REPORT – fostertech@hshv.org

- Mild fatigue but still eating, drinking, and caring for babies
- Mild clear vaginal discharge post-delivery that is improving
- Mild mammary gland enlargement without pain or redness

If your foster pet goes missing

- **Contact the foster emergency phone 734-717-4424**

WHEN IN DOUBT

If you are **unsure**, especially with kittens, **reach out**. We would rather answer a “false alarm” than miss a true emergency. Thank you for caring for our foster animals—your observations save lives ❤️

Foster Emergency Phone: 734-717-4424

Medical foster communication: fostertech@hshv.org

General foster communication: fosters@hshv.org

Foster Manager: 734-661-3520