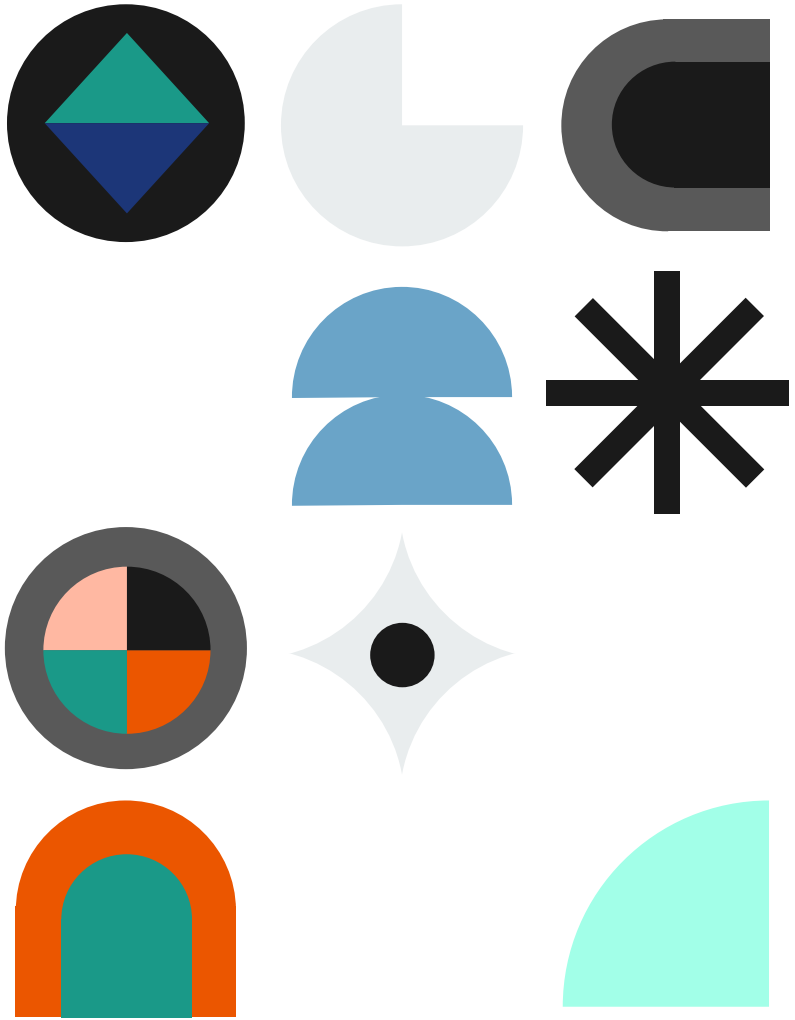
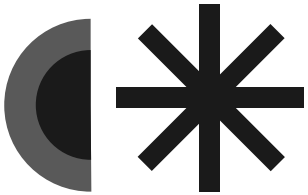
Updated Kitten care for 2026





Vaccinations

Vaccinate upon intake regardless of age

Feeding schedule

Newborns don’t necessarily need to be fed every 2 hours

APGAR scores

Provide a valuable insight into prognosis for newborns

Vaccinate ALL upon intake

New vaccination recommendations for neonatal puppies and kittens

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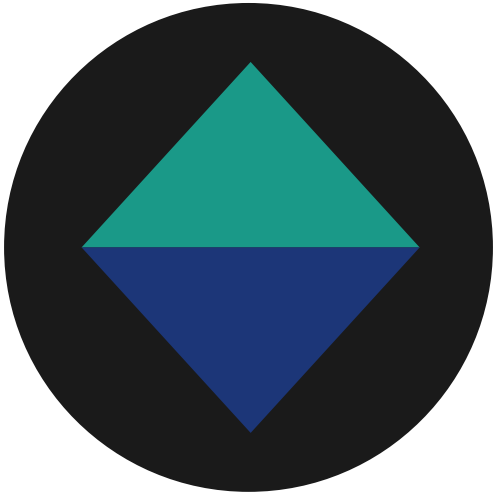
UC DAVIS KORET SHELTER MEDICINE PROGRAM

- Most stray kittens/puppies are not protected by mother's antibodies upon birth

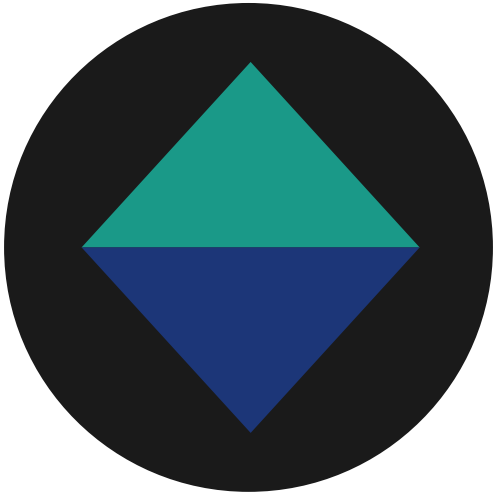
- One study showed 60% of stray cats at a shelter unprotected; another study showed 67% of TNR cats unprotected

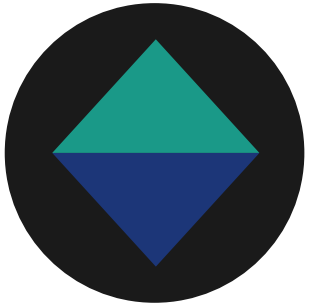
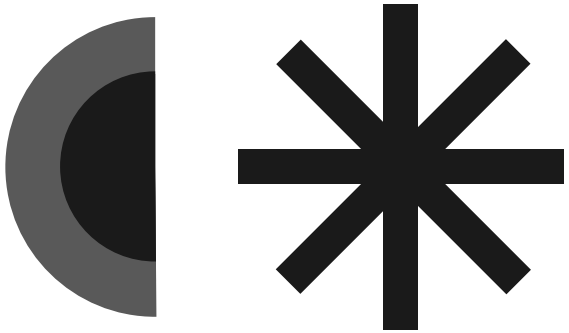
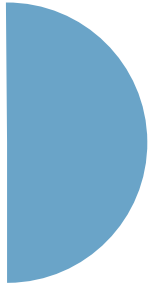
- 1998 study in puppies found no adverse events after vaccination at birth and steady antibody levels



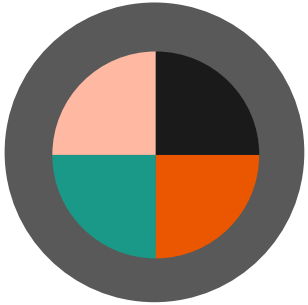
Recommendation: When meaningful risk is present, both vaccination at the earliest possible time *and* minimizing exposure should be used in combination to the greatest extent possible.

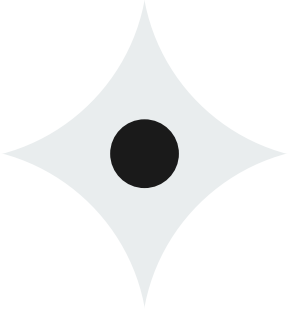
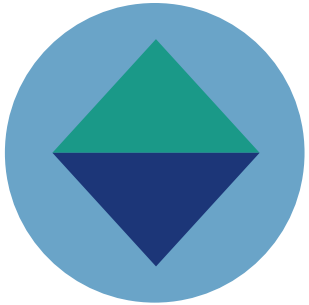
UW & UCD Shelter Medicine Groups



Bottle feed less often



MADDIE'S® UNIVERSITY

Taking the Fear out of Bottle Feeding and Basic Kitten Care

ENROLL

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Overview | Forum Discussion Group | Contents (5)

Did you know healthy neonatal kittens do NOT need to be fed every two hours? Learn about the latest guidelines for kitten feeding and other kitten care in this course. The course was developed by the Kitten College at the Animal Welfare League of Arlington in Arlington, VA to help their foster caregivers raise happy, healthy kittens. The first kitten nursery of its kind, Arlington went from saving 92 kittens a year in 2016 to over 1500 kittens in 2023. Since its inception, the Kitten College program has been implemented in a growing number of shelters and rescues across the country.

Watching kittens grow up and become ready for their own homes is a rewarding experience. Kittens are vulnerable and require special care and daily monitoring, which you'll learn about in this course.

After successfully completing this course you will be able to:

- Prepare for the arrival of your kittens
- Monitor your kittens' health
- Provide age-appropriate housing

You cannot overfeed a kitten, but you can feed too often!

Arlington Animal Welfare League Kitten College

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KITTEN COLLEGE

DO NOT FEED EVERY TWO HOURS!!!!

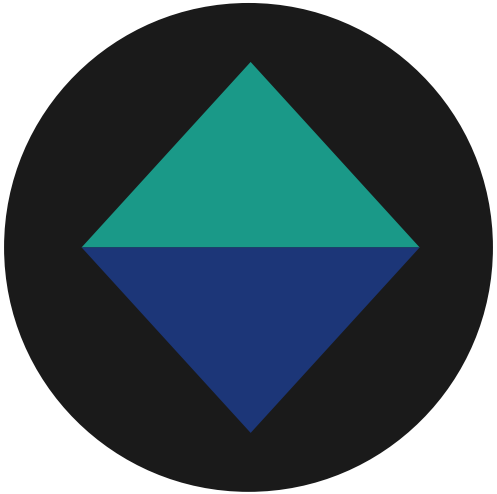
- Bottle feeding delivers a large volume all at once
- Stomachs stretch allowing for longer period of rest
- Overfeeding is dangerous
- Kittens can go longer overnight
- Rest is vital for kitten health
- *"You cannot overfeed a kitten but you can feed them too often!"*
- Considerations - hypoglycemia, especially in compromised kittens

ANIMAL WELFARE LEAGUE OF ARLINGTON

- A kitten can take in a large amount of formula at one time with no harm, but you risk diarrhea if you feed too frequently

- Kittens require sleep just as much as they require nutrition; don’t wake a sleeping kitten just to feed

- Take into consideration overall health; these tips do not apply to kittens prone to hypoglycemia or those needing additional treatments



Fast Facts

Kitten Feeding Chart

General feeding guidelines:

- Kittens are individuals, and feedings should be tailored to each specific situation.
- "Daily" means feedings evenly spaced over a 24-hour period.
- Avoid "homemade" formulas (only use in an emergency, over a very short term until a quality kitten milk replacer can be obtained).
- Do not use cow's milk or confuse 'Cat Milk' with kitten milk replacement formula. 'Cat Milk' is meant as a treat for older cats and does not contain the nutrients necessary to support kittens.

Age in weeks	Weight	mL per day	Daily feedings
1	4 oz.	32 mL	6 - 8
2	7 oz.	56 mL	4 - 6
3	10 oz.	80 mL	3 - 4
4	13 oz.	104 mL	3
5	1 pound	128 mL	3
6+	Solids, may still nurse	Variable	3
FYI: 15 mL = approximately 3 teaspoons or ½ ounce			

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APGAR score for newborns

A BRIEF DIVE INTO HISTORY: THE ORIGIN OF APGAR SCORES

The APGAR score, a tool initially developed for human neonates, owes its inception to the pioneering work of **Virginia Apgar** (1909-1974).

An American obstetrical anesthesiologist, Apgar was a trailblazer in anesthesiology, teratology, and neonatology.

Her most renowned contribution, however, remains the **Apgar score, designed to swiftly assess the health of newborn children right after birth.**

The Apgar scale evaluates newborns based on five criteria, each scored from zero to two.

The cumulative score ranges from zero to ten.

These criteria, cleverly forming a backronym, are:

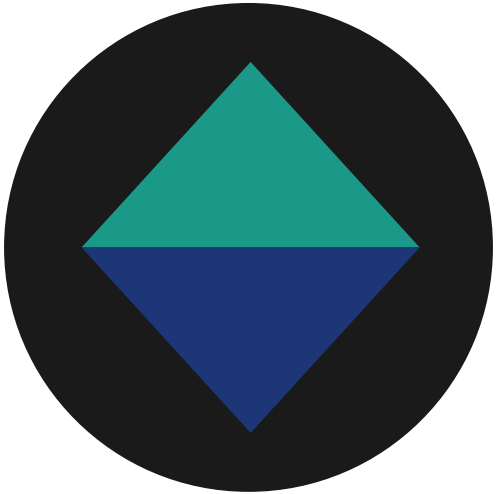
– **Appearance**: The skin's color, texture, and overall look, particularly the face.

– **Pulse**: Essentially the heart rate.

– **Grimace** or Reflex irritability: an involuntary response to stimuli.

– **Activity**: The movement and flexion/extension of limbs.

– **Respiration**: Respiratory effort and frequency.



IMPORTANT UPDATE!

The RECOVER Initiative has published the 2025 RECOVER Newborn Resuscitation Guidelines!

Apgar scoring as a method for newborn viability assessment was originally described for newborn infants and then modified for use in newborn puppies and kittens [24-28]. Scores of 0–2 are assigned to each parameter (heart rate [HR], respiratory effort, reflex irritability, motility, and mucous membrane color), with a lower score indicating more severe depression [26]. In newborn puppies, low modified Apgar scores obtained within 5 min were highly associated with early mortality and were significantly lower in puppies born by Cesarean section (C-section) than in those born by eutocia [24-26]. However, as an Apgar score cutoff indicating the need for resuscitative measures at birth has not been established, we suggest against using a specific Apgar score to trigger resuscitation measures at birth. That said, once a newborn is identified as not requiring resuscitation or is recovering from initial resuscitation, it should be monitored using serial Apgar scoring (e.g., at 5, 30, and 60 min after birth) to identify those at risk of deterioration. Vigorous newborns should be weighed and examined for congenital conditions [29, 30], and their umbilical cord should be ligated, trimmed to 1 cm, and disinfected with a 2% tincture of iodine. The puppy or kitten can then be united with the dam in a warm environment (29°C–32°C [84°F–89°F]) that supports newborn normothermia (i.e., 35°C–37°C [95°F–99°F]). We suggest determining the body weight every 12 h, expecting a daily weight gain of 10%.

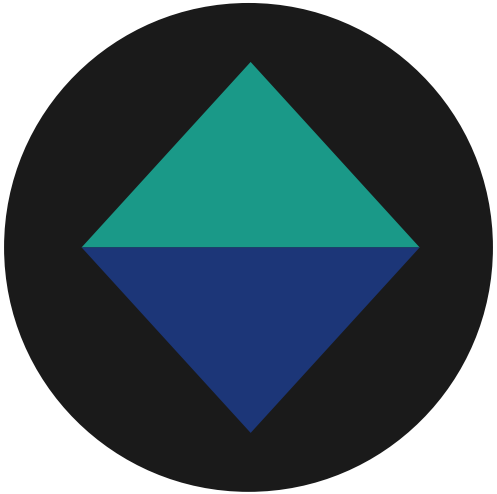
How to evaluate neonates' health at intake?

SIGN	Score		
	0	1	2
Color	Cyanotic	Pale	Pink
Reflex irritability	Absence	Grimace	Vigorous
Heart rate	<180bpm	180-220bpm	>220bpm
Respiratory effort	<6 rr	6-15 rr	>15 rr
Muscle tone	Flacid	Some flexion	Active motion

And here is how we should interpret APGAR scores in newborn kittens and puppies.

- **Scores < 7** => indicate the need for assistance.

- **Scores < 4** typically necessitate immediate veterinary intervention.

- **Scores between 4 and 7?** Revisit resuscitation techniques if the APGAR was conducted right after birth. If later, it's crucial to supplement with a dedicated canine/feline milk replacer and optimize the newborn's environment.

- APGAR newborns (minutes to 3 days old) upon intake
- Allows assessment of resources; do you have a team who can help newborns in distress?
- Serial APGAR scores can give good idea of prognosis