



# FOSTER CARE MANUAL FOR DOGS AND PUPPIES



YourSPCA.org || 300 Harlem Road  
716.875.7360 || West Seneca, NY 14224



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# **Pregnancy and Care of the Pregnant Dog**

When a pregnant dog comes in to the SPCA we generally have very little information about her background. Some dogs that appear large may not deliver for weeks, while some that appear average may give birth within a few hours of being placed into your home. We do our best at the shelter to give you an estimate on when the puppies will be delivered.

Before placing a pregnant dog into foster care, she is usually vaccinated, dewormed and behaviorally evaluated by the SPCA staff. There are several other diseases that we are unable to test for and conditions that can arise unbeknownst to us when placing a dog in your care. Consequently, there is some risk associated to you or to your pets when you foster a dog whose background is unknown. The dog/or puppies should be kept in a separate area from your pets for this reason.

The dog's gestation is approximately 63 days in length. As the gestation period comes to an end, the pregnant dog becomes restless, searching for a suitable den or nest in which to deliver her puppies. She looks for somewhere private, quiet and dry. Litter sizes vary, depending on the breed of the dog, three to ten puppies is average.

Usually a good eater, the pregnant dog's desire for food disappears as she enters into labor. Some dogs will dislike interference at this point, while some may seem to enjoy having company during their labor. Most will gladly stay in an area provided by the foster parent for the birth of the puppies. If the mother dog attempts to find a different location to give birth, gently put her back in the place you have selected. Usually she will comply, but sometimes a very independent dog will only be happy giving birth in private. The mother dog should be provided with an area that is large enough for her and her puppies and ideally lined with soft towels, sheets or blankets.

## **Labor**

When the first stage of labor starts, the mother dog's rate of breathing increases and she may begin to breathe through her mouth and start to pant. This stage may last for hours and the foster parent should not be overly concerned.

During this stage, uterine contractions begin. The mother dog will appear restless and may pace, dig, shiver, pant, or even vomit. This is all normal and all you can do be sure that she has water available. This stage of labor can be long, lasting 6 to 12 hours and culminates with full dilation of the cervix in preparation to expel a puppy.

Provided that the mother dog is happy, there is no need at this point for interference. It is important to ensure that you have all of the necessary supplies (a private area, soft blankets and towels that are easily changeable, water for mom, extra towels) and that the birthing room is warm enough. The room temperature should be at least 72°, as a cold room can cause hypothermia in the newborn puppies.

As labor progresses, there will be some vaginal discharge, colorless at first but later becoming blood tinged. If at any time she has a foul smelling discharge or if bleeding is profuse, this may be a sign of trouble and you need to call for help. Any sign of bright red blood is also indicative of a need to call for help. Please contact the Foster Care Department at (716) 875-7360 Ext 216.

The second stage of labor is the hard labor stage in which the first puppy is expelled. Expect one pup every 30 to 45 minutes with 10 to 30 minutes of hard straining. You might also expect some puppies (probably half of them) to be born tail first. This is not abnormal for dogs. It is normal for the mom dog to take a rest partway through delivery, and she may not strain at all for up to four hours between pups. If she is seen straining hard for more than one hour or if she takes longer than a four hour break, please call the SPCA for further instructions.

The third stage of labor refers to the expulsion of the placenta and afterbirth. Each pup may not be followed by afterbirth; the mother may pass two pups and then two placentas. This is normal. Puppies are born covered in membranes that must be cleaned away or the pup will suffocate. The mother will bite and lick the membranes away. Allow her a minute or two after birth to do this; if she does not do it, then you must clean the pup for her. Simply remove the slippery covering and rub the puppy with a clean towel. The umbilical cord may be tied in a knot about one inch from the pup and cut with scissors on the far side of the knot. Be careful not to pull on the umbilical cord as this can injure the puppy. The mother may want to eat the placenta but this is probably not a good idea as vomiting it up later is common; it is best to clean away the placenta yourself.

## **Birth**

The first amniotic sac will soon come into view. In a regular birth, the enclosed puppy will be born within 15 to 30 minutes. Very often, the mother's constant licking will rupture the sac. If this happens you should remain calm and resist the temptation to interfere. If the puppy is being born head first, a few more contractions should release it.

In about one-third of all births, the hind legs emerge first. This is only slightly more difficult for the mother dog than a head-first birth. In a true breech birth (the puppy is arriving hindquarters and tail first) the mother dog may become agitated and turn around repeatedly in attempts to release the wedged puppy. She may find it easier to bear down if she can push with her hind legs against the box or your hand. Even with this help, the birth may take 20 minutes. The mother dog's persistence will probably ensure delivery. If she should weaken or become distressed, you should

be ready to call the SPCA for help. In most births there are no complications, and only in a very few do serious difficulties arise.

There are three main phases that the mother dog goes through once a puppy is born. The first phase will be to break away the birth sac that covers the puppy. Next, she will clean the nose and mouth of the newborn, enabling him/her to take his/her first breath. Lastly the mother dog bites through the umbilical cord, separating the puppy from the placenta. She will ingest the cord up to about an inch from the puppies' belly. The remaining cord should be left alone and will eventually dry up and fall off on its own. Following this the mother may want to eat the placenta but this is probably not a good idea as vomiting it up later is common; it is best to clean away the placenta yourself. After these crucial steps, the mother dog vigorously licks the puppy all over, helping the fur to dry and allowing the puppy to stay warm. The next puppy will soon arrive and the process will begin all over again.

## **Problems**

Occasionally a new mother does not attempt to remove the sac from the puppy. She may not know what to do or she may be too busy with the next delivery. In this case, give her a minute to realize what is needed, but if there is no sign of action, act quickly. Gently remove the membrane, being careful not to pull on the umbilical cord as it can easily cause a hernia. If the mother dog still does not begin to help, carefully cut the cord about one inch from the puppy's belly. Tie the cord off with dental floss at the cut end. Then, rub the puppy dry with a clean towel to remove the amniotic fluid and stimulate breathing. After the puppy is breathing well, place it close to the mother's belly. The puppy will usually find a nipple and begin to suckle. This is generally enough to arouse the mother dog's natural instincts to take over.

Apart from a mother dog being unable to deliver a breech puppy, there are two other situations when it is vital to call the SPCA for help. The first situation is one in which the mother has strong contractions for two hours with no sign of a puppy appearing. This may be due to two puppies blocking the birth canal.

The second situation is uterine inertia, when the mother suddenly appears to tire before or after the first puppy is born. This is different than a dog resting between births. She will seem generally exhausted and distressed, and help will be needed.

Occasionally a mother dog is very protective of her puppies. Carefully observe your foster dog before trying to handle her puppies or before putting your hands or face near the birthing place.

If you feel that your pregnant dog has gone beyond the point when she should have delivered her puppies, please call the SPCA immediately at (716) 875-7360.

# Puppy Development

After the puppies are born, the mother dog will clean herself and then settle down with her newborn puppies. Around this time, remove the soiled bedding and replace it with clean, warm bedding. Clean the area if necessary. Place the puppies back with the mother dog and allow them to nurse.

The first milk, called colostrum, is only produced for a few days. It is rich in protein and minerals and contains antibodies that protect the puppies from disease. For this reason it is very important that infant puppies nurse from their mother. The puppies will put on weight steadily, gaining as much as a half-ounce per day during the initial period of rapid growth.

Occasionally, a puppy will be pushed out by another puppy when it is attempting to nurse. This is normal, but if the same puppy is repeatedly kept from the nipple it will fall behind in growth and development. A puppy repeatedly pushed away by the mother may suffer a decrease in body temperature. If this occurs, warm the puppy and attempt to place it back with the mother dog. If this does not work, you will need to call the SPCA for help. You may need to start feeding the puppy yourself. Careful examination of the puppy may reveal a defect such as a cleft pallet, or it may just be a “runt.”

A puppy will use heat receptors in its nose to find the nipple. Dog milk is high in fat and protein. Puppies will compete for the most productive nipple and by two days of age, the puppies know which nipples are most productive. Puppies that latch onto the most productive nipples grow quickly.

At birth, a puppy is totally helpless, unable to even regulate its own body temperature. Within four days it is able to find its mother and crawl to her from 2 feet away. By two weeks old coordination is sufficiently developed for it to use its front legs, and by three weeks of age the puppies can stand tentatively. By seven weeks of age the puppies leap, run, and seem to have developed a near perfect sense of balance. Watching puppies grow is fun and fascinating!

## **Puppy/Dog Developmental Periods**

- Puppies are born with closed eyes and tiny folded-down ears
- The stump of the umbilical cord will dry up and fall off in about five days
- Eyes open between 14 and 21 days
- At approximately three weeks puppies begin to crawl and their ears begin to straighten
- Between three and four weeks teething begins
- By about four weeks a puppy can stand and weaning begins
- At five weeks a puppy can stand and eat at a bowl easily
- Between five and six weeks puppies become mischievous and begin playing and running around
- By six weeks the puppies can receive their first inoculation and deworming (Occasionally a puppy will require deworming at an earlier age) (Please see diarrhea section)
- By eight to nine weeks of age the puppies should be ready for adoption

## **Care of the Orphaned Puppy**

Foster homes receive orphaned puppies from the SPCA at all ages, ranging from one day old to puppies that are very close to being ready for their spay/neuter surgeries. Orphaned puppies require the same care as puppies with mothers, but in this case, the foster parent must take on the duties of the mother dog.

There are often more duties, and sometimes more problems, for foster parents who take on the responsibility of orphaned puppies. While this booklet hopes to prepare foster parents for their duties, there are issues with orphaned puppies that we have not experienced and consequently have not addressed in this booklet. If you have an experience that is not addressed, feel free to call the Foster Care department at (716) 875-7360 Ext 216.

Puppies become orphaned in a number of ways. The death of the mother dog or abandonment by the mother dog is the most common reason. Less common reasons include maternal aggression towards the puppies or an inability to produce enough milk. In these cases, it is important for the SPCA to work with foster families to provide what the mother dog can no longer provide.

We recommend two types of feeding for orphaned infant puppies: bottle or syringe. Bottle-feeding takes the longest amount of time but provides more satisfaction for the puppy. Syringe feeding is somewhat faster, but can be messy. Proper instruction is necessary to avoid aspiration of liquid.

Foster parents who are interested in specializing in very young orphans need more free time since the puppies need to be fed more often.

The SPCA will provide special commercial puppy formula to foster homes. The formula comes in a powdered form and is mixed with water. Mix only enough to use within a 24-hour period. Discard any remaining formula after 24 hours. Open formula containers and mixed bottles must be refrigerated when not in use. Formula should feel warm when tested on your wrist. Because a dog's body temperature is 3 to 4 degrees warmer than a human's, milk from a mother dog would be warmer than what we are used to. The warm formula will encourage a puppy to nurse. Puppies should not be laid on their backs to nurse but should nurse with their tummies facing down. This will help prevent aspiration of the formula into their lungs, a situation that could easily cause death or serious illness to a puppy.

Puppies that nurse from a mother dog will suckle 10 to 20 times a day. A foster parent hand-raising a litter of puppies may find this impractical. Infant puppies, between the ages of newborn and four weeks, should be fed every three hours during the hours you are awake. However, a feeding every six hours will allow them to get enough nourishment to live and grow. Feedings more than eight hours apart would make it very difficult for a puppy to properly grow and develop.

Puppies have a strong instinct to suckle and are generally not satisfied when nursing on a bottle or being tube fed. At times they may attempt to nurse off one another's genitals, sometimes resulting in pain and discomfort. Some foster parents separate their puppies into several small boxes to eliminate this problem. Providing a fleece toy or towel may help. After feeding, gently wipe the puppies face with a warm, damp cloth and then dry to imitate the mother's grooming. Puppies can be given a bath with a very mild soap and water. It is important to ensure they are dried very well. You can use a hair dryer on a very low temperature to do so.

## **How to Mix the Formula**

The SPCA usually uses KMR (a powder), the instructions on how to prepare the formula are located on the can. (There is even a scoop included inside the can.) The ratio is one part formula to two parts warm water. Mix only enough to use within a 24-hour period. Formula that is not in use should be refrigerated and any remaining formula should be discarded after 24 hours.

When mixing the formula, it is very important to dissolve all of the formula into the water. (Many foster parents whisk the formula rather than stir it with a spoon.) If the mixture is clumpy, the consistency will be wrong and the kitten will have trouble drinking it from the bottle.



To warm the bottle, microwave water in a mug for 1 - 2 minutes. Once the water is warm, place the bottle in the mug and leave it for a few minutes allowing it to warm up. The formula should feel warm when tested on your wrist. Because a dog's body temperature is three to four degrees warmer than a human's, milk from a mother dog would be warmer than what we are used to.

## **Approaching your Puppies to Feed Them**

When handling your puppies, it is important to pay attention to how they are acting. Do they feel warm? (They should be.) Are they responsive to your touch? (They should be.) Do they wake up and begin to cry and squirm? (This is a perfectly normal reaction.)

Sometimes young puppies are admitted to the shelter, and even with our best attempts, they do not survive. They may have been lively and active upon arrival and placed in the incubator to warm up before feeding, but there is never a guarantee that they will thrive and survive. Because of their small body weight and immature immune systems, they can die from the simplest disorder, and diligent nursing care is critical to their survival.

If there is a concern with puppies under your care, do not hesitate to alert a Foster Care Employee, (716) 875-7360 Ext 216. They are here to assist you with whatever you may need.

As long as the puppies feel warm and are responsive to your touch, then it is OK to begin feeding them. Some puppies are hungry and latch on quickly and other puppies have trouble at first and syringe feeding needs to be done instead of bottle feeding.

## **How to Properly Feed Your Puppies**

After assessing your puppies to see if they are warm and responsive, gently pick one puppy up and wrap it in a small towel. (It is very important to keep the puppy as warm as possible during feedings.) You may sit or stand, whichever is most comfortable. Some puppies are quite active and will squirm out of their towel, therefore it is very important to wrap them as snug as possible while feeding. Once they begin to eat, they usually calm down and focus on eating instead of rooting for the nipple.

Puppies should not be laid on their backs to nurse, and should nurse with tummies facing down. This will help prevent aspiration of the formula into the lungs. If you see milk coming out of a puppy's nose, or if the puppy seems to be coughing while eating, immediately STOP and reassess your position of the puppy and the size of the hole in the nipple. (See photos below)



**CORRECT!**



**CORRECT!**

## Puppy Feeding Schedule

Birth - 2 weeks: every 3 hours (8 times per day)

3 weeks: every 4 hours (6 times per day)

4 weeks: every 5 hours (5 times per day)

4 - 5 weeks: 4 - 5 times per day (Begin to introduce canned kitten food and formula slurry)

If the puppy seems fussy at first, or does not drink the amount listed above during the first meal of the day, don't worry too much, there are a few reasons he/she is acting like this:

- The puppy just ate (it has a round belly and seems content)
- The puppy is used to mom and not the bottle or syringe yet
- The puppy is new born and has yet to grasp the concept of nursing

After feeding, gently wipe the kitten's face with a warm, damp cloth to try to imitate the mother's grooming.

## **After You Have Fed Your Puppy**

Make sure you mark on a feeding chart what time you fed them and the amount. It is important to keep track of how often the puppies are being fed and how much they are eating during each feeding. Consult the chart above to see when your next feeding should take place.

## **Keeping the Puppies Warm**

Infant puppies are unable to regulate their body temperature. They can quickly succumb to hypothermia, so it is extremely important that they be kept warm. During the first two weeks of life, foster parents should keep the puppies in an area with a temperature of 85°. A constant temperature can be kept by using a heating pad under half of the puppies bedding. It can be as dangerous for a puppy to be overheated as chilled so make certain that the heating pad is placed in such a manner that the puppy can move off the heat onto unheated bedding if necessary.

At two weeks of age the temperature can be dropped to 80° and at four weeks can be lowered to 75°.

## **Stimulating the Puppies for Elimination Purposes**

Puppies need to be manually stimulated to eliminate urine and feces. Usually, the mother dog will lick the puppy's belly and genitals to stimulate them to go, therefore, you will need to stimulate them after each meal. There are a few different ways you can do this.

To begin you can use a wet, warm cotton ball or piece of cloth and gently stroke the puppy's belly and anal area while it is on the towel. You can also hold the puppy over a sink and stimulate it the same way using warm water just over the private areas. Keep stimulating the puppy until it finishes eliminating (but know when to stop or you may make the delicate skin raw). Normal stools have a toothpaste-like consistency and are a yellow-mustard color. Don't worry if the puppy isn't having stool after every feeding, or even every day. Puppies will start to eliminate on their own by two to three weeks of age.

## **Tucking them in until the Next Feeding**

Once your puppies have been fed, have eliminated urine and feces, and seem content, then it's time to place them back into the area that you are keeping them in. Feel free to peak in on the puppies from time-to-time while they're in that area. It is definitely one of the cutest things to see! Your puppies should be warm, cuddling, and best of all, sleeping!

## **Weaning**

Beginning at three to four weeks of age, you can offer the puppies formula in a shallow bowl or saucer. When they learn to drink from the bowl, add puppy food in small amounts to the formula. Gradually increase the amount of puppy food and decrease the amount of formula.

Canned food is also helpful in the weaning process. Adding formula to the canned food can be very enticing to a puppy.

Puppies that don't understand the eating process can be encouraged if you place a small amount of food on a front paw where they will clean it off or by placing a small amount of food in their mouths. Soaking puppy kibble in water (or formula) will make it easier for the puppy to eat dry food.

By five weeks of age the puppies will have a full set of pin-sharp teeth and should be able to handle puppy food. These teeth play a role in weaning the puppy as sharp teeth can become very annoying to the nursing mother. As the puppies mature and try to nurse, the mother dog will begin to push them away.

When the puppies reach six weeks of age they will need to come to the SPCA for their first vaccinations and deworming appointment. Please call first so the SPCA is prepared for you. Your visit to the SPCA should not take too much time, especially if we are prepared for your arrival!

## **Health**

Healthy puppies are plump and have good skin tone. They feel warm to the touch. If placed on their backs or sides they will quickly right themselves to a crawling position. Healthy puppies nurse vigorously and seldom cry unless disturbed. They generally nest closely with one another. Sick puppies feel cold, thin and limp. They lie scattered in the nest. They may cry incessantly and sound weak, and are often too weak to nurse effectively. Puppies that are failing may have become chilled, they may be starving or they may be dehydrated.

Puppies can become chilled very quickly. Chilling will increase the puppies' susceptibility to bacterial infection of their intestinal and respiratory systems. Starvation and dehydration, which almost always occur together, can kill puppies very quickly. If you have a puppy in this condition, and need to transport it to the SPCA make certain it is as warm as possible. Use a warm hot water bottle (pop bottles work well) in a small carrier and cover the carrier with a towel to maintain the heat.

If you have talked to the SPCA and have been instructed to provide oral fluids, medication or sustenance, remember that weak puppies can easily aspirate liquid into their lungs. If they do, they will most likely not survive. Take it slow, keep the puppies on their stomachs and do not force any fluids.

Your puppies' eyes should be bright and clear. Any discharge collecting in the corners should be cleaned away with a cotton ball soaked in warm water. The ears should be clean in appearance and free of discharge or odor. Routine cleaning of ears should be accomplished by gently wiping with a moistened cotton ball. The nose should be clean and moist without discharge or sores.

Examine puppies' mouths regularly; the gums should appear pink and healthy.

Feel your puppies' body regularly for lumps, ticks, or tumors. Legs should be inspected for any swollen joints and look between the toes for tiny objects that could be stuck.

Check your puppies' anus for possible infection, swelling or intestinal parasites.

## **Socialization**

Your orphaned puppies will need to be socialized while in your care. Try to make certain that you are not the only person handling them. Puppies that are not socialized will grow into dogs that are not socialized. Dog behavior experts suggest that puppies should be socialized to a minimum of five people, but the more people they meet and have positive experiences with the more socially well rounded they will be. If you live alone, invite your friends over to play with and handle the puppies. Make every attempt to provide this socialization daily for your puppies from around five weeks of age up until they are returned to the shelter. Special care should be used when introducing puppies to children. Wrap the puppy in a loose towel before allowing a child to handle the puppy and instruct the child to be seated. Small puppies' nails do not retract and a scratched child might be startled and easily drop or injure a puppy.

As your puppies become more mobile, move them around the house to get them used to a changing environment. Allow them to play and explore in a new room individually and as a group. Carry only one puppy per hand. With two in a hand, you could easily squeeze the puppies together and harm them if they began to squirm.

If you have any behavior concerns about your foster dog or her puppies, please do not hesitate to call the Behavior Department at (716) 875-7360 Ext 210.

# FOODS THAT ARE TOXIC TO DOGS

Based on information from ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center

Alcohol	Rhubarb Leaves
Avocado	Salt and Salty Snack Foods
Caffeine	Tobacco
Chives	Xylitol
Chocolate	Yeast Dough
Citrus	
Coffee	
Coconut	
Coconut Oil	
Garlic	
Grapes	
Macadamia Nuts	
Mushrooms	
Nuts	
Onions	
Persimmons	
Raisins	
Raw/Undercooked Meat	
Raw/Undercooked Eggs	
Raw/Undercooked Bones	

# DOGGIE LANGUAGE

starring Boogie the Boston Terrier



ALERT



SUSPICIOUS



ANXIOUS



THREATENED



ANGRY



"PEACE!"  
look away/head turn



STRESSED  
yawn



STRESSED  
nose lick



"PEACE!"  
sniff ground



"RESPECT!"  
turn & walk away



"NEED SPACE"  
whale eye



STALKING



STRESSED  
scratching



STRESS RELEASE  
shake off



RELAXED  
soft ears, blinky eyes



"RESPECT!"  
offer his back



FRIENDLY & POLITE  
curved body



FRIENDLY



"PRETTY PLEASE"  
round puppy face



"I'M YOUR LOVEBUG"  
belly-rub pose



"HELLO I LOVE YOU!"  
greeting stretch



"I'M FRIENDLY!"  
play bow



"READY!"  
prey bow



"YOU WILL FEED ME"



CURIOUS  
head tilt



HAPPY  
(or hot)



OVERJOYED  
wiggly



"MMMM...."



"I LOVE YOU,  
DON'T STOP"