



Puppy Foster Care Manual

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Important Notice

Outdoors

Puppies under the age of eight weeks are among the most vulnerable animals in need of care. They have not developed immunity to many potentially fatal diseases in dogs. While it may be tempting to take the foster puppy to public places like parks, it is essential to avoid areas where another dog has urinated or defecated. Even if an area looks clean, it could still harbor contagious diseases.

For the puppy's safety, the puppy must remain indoors until it is fully vaccinated. If the puppy must be taken outdoors, do not put it on the ground. It must be carried at all times. Help ensure its health and well-being by following proper care guidelines.



Understanding Puppy Growth

Introduction Puppies undergo rapid development and growth over a short period. During their first two weeks of life, puppies are entirely dependent on their caregivers as they are developing their reflexes, hearing, and vision.

From three weeks onward, puppies become increasingly aware of their surroundings and begin to learn about the world. This is a critical period for socialization, helping them develop into well-adjusted adult dogs.

1-3 weeks old During the first three weeks of a puppy's life, its needs will consist of warmth, food, and sleep. Its behavior will be more reflexive and will need to be stimulated to use the bathroom.

At this age, puppies are unable to regulate their body temperature. Handle the puppy gently for brief periods of time. The puppy's sense of smell begins to develop during this stage.



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Understanding Puppy Growth, Continued

4-7 weeks old

During this stage, the puppy's primary needs consist of food and sleep. At this stage, puppies:

- Open their eyes,
- Become aware of their surroundings,
- Respond to stimuli,
- Relieve their bowel/bladder on their own,
- Learn bite inhibition, and
- Control their body temperature.

Begin handling the puppy regularly. In a reasonable and safe fashion, expose the puppy to people, animals, and noises. Also, provide a sensory-rich environment for the puppy.

Weaning the puppy from soft food should begin during week 4.



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Understanding Puppy Growth, Continued

8+ weeks old At this age, the puppy's primary needs consist of food, play, and plenty of socialization.

They begin learning basic tasks and commands. The puppy should be fully weaned to hard food by 8 weeks of age.



Note: Puppies that are four weeks and older are at their most developmental period. Socialization is crucial during this time.

Keeping Your Foster Puppy Warm

Warmth

It is crucial to provide a warm environment for puppies while also ensuring they have the option to cool down if needed. When using a heating pad, be sure to:

- Cover any exposed cords,
- Place blankets over the heated surface for added safety,
- Always set the heating pads to the lowest setting to ensure comfort and avoid overheating, and
- Never allow puppies to come into direct contact with the heat source.

Additional heat sources, such as rice socks or heated water bottles, can also provide supplemental warmth, ensuring puppies stay cozy without the risk of overheating.



Feeding Your Foster Puppy

Feeding

Puppies require a daily intake of the right amount of food to support their rapid growth and development. They should be allowed to eat until they are full, but not to the point of bloating. The type of food, portion sizes, and feeding frequency will depend on the puppy's age, weight, and breed.

Generally, puppy formula should be mixed in a ratio of one part formula to two parts water. Always follow the instructions on the formula packaging. The suggested feeding schedule below provides guidance.

Suggested Feeding Schedule

Age	Feeding Frequency
0-1 Weeks	Bottle feeding every 2 hours.
1-2 Weeks	Bottle feeding every 2-3 hours.
2-3 Weeks	Bottle feeding every 3-4 hours.
3-4 Weeks	Bottle feeding every 4-5 hours. Puppies may start lapping from a bowl.
4-5 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce gruel at this stage.• Puppies can eat and drink from a saucer at 4 weeks of age.• Perform bottle feeding as needed to prevent crying from hunger.
5-6 Weeks	Feed gruel four times a day. Gradually thicken the gruel and introduce dry food and water.
6+ Weeks	Feed dry puppy food three times a day.

Note: Gruel is a mixture of food with a higher water-to-solid ratio.

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Feeding Your Foster Puppy, Continued

Important bottle- feeding tips

Follow the essential safety tips below for bottle feeding a foster puppy:

- Never feed puppies cow's milk, dairy alternatives, or human baby formulas as these can be harmful or even fatal during the bottle-feeding stage.
- Sterilize bottles and nipples before each use and warm the formula to no more than 100°F. Test the formula by placing a drop on your wrist, which should feel warm, not hot.
- Ensure the bottle's nipple drips properly. If it is not dripping, slightly enlarge the hole. If the formula flows too quickly or the hole is too large, it can lead to aspiration.
- Always position the puppy on its stomach wrapped in either a towel or blanket, whichever is more comfortable for the puppy.
- Gently lift its head to a 45-degree angle and begin feeding. Never feed a puppy while it is lying on its back or being held in the air, as this can cause aspiration.
- Keep the puppy's head elevated and gently rub its abdomen to help release any swallowed air after feeding. Some puppies will burp after each feeding.

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Feeding Your Foster Puppy, Continued

Weaning

The weaning process typically begins around 3-4 weeks when puppies start showing interest in chewing on the bottle nipple. The weaning process may be messy, however:

- Start by creating a slurry by mixing the formula with warm, wet puppy food.
- Continue offering bottle formula meals until the puppy is reliably eating from a dish.
- Decrease the frequency of bottle feeding as the puppy consumes more wet food or gruel.
- Transition the puppy exclusively to wet food after a few days. Gradually introduce dry food as the puppy's teeth develop.
- Provide fresh, clean water in a shallow bowl, and always supervise the puppy until it is drinking confidently from a dish on its own.

Note: Patience is key. Some puppies transition quickly, while others may take a few weeks to adjust to their new surroundings.



After-Feeding Care

Stimulating

Stimulation is the process of manually making a puppy urinate and defecate.

Bottle-fed puppies require stimulation after every feeding. Until about 3 weeks of age, a puppy is unable to urinate or defecate on its own.

Refer to the table below for tips on how to properly stimulate a puppy.

Step	Action
1	Use a clean, soft, damp, and warm cloth to gently rub the puppy's anus and genital area until it starts to urinate or defecate.
2	Continue rubbing until the process is complete, which may take up to a minute.
3	Clean the puppy's anus and genitals to prevent any skin irritation.

Cleaning

Puppies require regular cleaning. After feeding, it is vital to keep its face clean. After stimulation, its anus and genitalia must be cleaned.

Use a clean, warm, damp cloth to wipe the foster puppy. If necessary, add a minimal amount of water-diluted blue Dawn® dish soap or a gentle baby shampoo. Always ensure your puppy is **completely** dry to prevent it from getting cold.

Potty Training

Potty Training

Animal Care will provide puppy potty pads to help with the training process. However, accidents are inevitable as puppies are learning, and it takes time. With patience and consistency, foster puppies can be taught to use potty pads or go outside to use the bathroom. Establishing a regular potty break routine is key to reducing accidents at home. It is recommended that potty breaks be scheduled, 15-20 minutes after meals.

Accidents will happen no matter how careful we are. If the puppy has an accident in the house, do not punish it. Simply clean it up and continue offering opportunities for the pet to go outside or use the potty pads. Stay consistent with the routine and praise the puppy when it goes in the right place. Positive reinforcement will help it learn faster.



Socialization

Socialization The early stages of a puppy's life, particularly between 3-12 weeks of age, are crucial for development and future sociability. During this time, a puppy's curiosity often outweighs its fear, making it an ideal period to introduce them to new experiences, people, and environments.

Safely expose the puppy to a variety of people, including men, women, children, and people in uniforms, to help it become comfortable with different types of interactions. If you have a cat, and the cat's temperament is suitable, consider short, supervised interactions between the puppy and the pet cat.

Always use caution when introducing the puppy to unfamiliar animals, as cats can be sensitive to the high energy and bouncy behavior of puppies. A cat that feels threatened may react defensively with scratches or bites. Similarly, puppies are still learning their boundaries and may unintentionally hurt a smaller animal by playing too roughly.

To ensure these interactions are positive, use treats, praise, and plenty of affection. Early exposure to cats, if done safely, can also help foster tolerance and encourage social skills.

Proper socialization during this critical period is essential. After this stage, puppies may become more fearful of new things, which can lead to behavioral issues rooted in anxiety. Positive, early experiences will help the puppy grow into a well-adjusted, confident adult dog.

Desensitization It is vital to handle a puppy as much as possible during its early development. Gently touch its mouth, ears, legs, paws, and stomach. Reward it every time it responds positively to being touched. If it shows any signs of discomfort or an adverse reaction, slow down and work with it regularly to desensitize it to that interaction. Gradually increase the handling as it becomes more comfortable.

Puppies are constantly observing and absorbing everything around them. Expose them to everyday household sounds and objects such as televisions, speakers, and vacuums. Praise and reward a puppy every time it encounters something new, helping it to form positive associations with these sounds and sights. This desensitization process will help it stay calm in different environments and around unfamiliar noises, making it more adaptable in the future.

Health Concerns and Emergencies

Emergency contact information

When fostering puppies, especially those that require bottle feeding, it is essential to monitor and address common health issues carefully. If a medical emergency arises, it needs to be addressed the same day it occurs. Notify the foster liaison **immediately** if the foster puppy requires medical attention.

The following numbers and emails can be used to contact a member of the foster liaison team.

During business hours:

Contact the foster liaison team at (909) 386-9820

After-hours:

In the event of an after-hours veterinary emergency involving your San Bernardino County Animal Care (SBCAC) foster pet, you are required to call SBCAC **immediately**. SBCAC staff will assess the situation carefully and will direct you on how to care for your foster pet. Please remember that after-hour care is limited and humane euthanasia may be the recommended outcome for your foster pet.

Critical concerns

Contact the foster liaison immediately if any of the behaviors or scenarios listed below are observed:

- Fading puppy symptoms:
 - Lethargy,
 - Poor appetite, and
 - Weight loss.
- Traumatic injuries resulting in significant bodily harm,
- Straining to urinate with little to no results,
- Foster animals are lost outside of the home,
- Open mouth breathing,
- Ate something poisonous,
- Seizures and/or stumbling.

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Health Concerns and Emergencies, Continued

Urgent concerns

If the following behaviors are observed, contact the foster liaison within 12 hours:

- Not eating for three meals in a row, but still active and alert,
- Limping (if eating and drinking normally),
- No bowel movement for 48 hours,
- Mild blood from nose/mouth, minor cuts, lacerations, scrapes that bleed for less than five minutes,
- Excessive vocalization,
- Unexpected death,
- Growling, lunging, scratching, biting at people or other animals, or
- Bites that break skin regardless of the animal's age.

Note: If any other behaviors are observed after hours, call the next day.

Non-Urgent Concerns

Contact the foster liaison within 24 hours if the following behaviors are observed, **and** the puppy remains bright, alert, responsive, and eating and drinking normally:

- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Coughing or sneezing
- Presence of worms in stool or vomit
- Repeated head shaking (if animal continues eating, drinking, urinating, and defecating normally)
- Scratching ticks, fleas, flea dirt
- Hair loss, thinning, of fur coat
- Eye or nasal discharge (if animal continues eating, drinking, urinating, and defecating normally).

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Health Concerns and Emergencies, Continued

Common causes of pet poisoning

Puppies are naturally curious and love to explore their surroundings. Their adventurous nature, combined with their tendency to chew and ingest items, makes them particularly vulnerable to accidental poisoning. It is essential to puppy-proof your home. Always supervise the foster and be aware of the common toxins and the symptoms of poisoning, which include:

- Household cleaning products (e.g., bleach, ammonia)
- Human foods (e.g., chocolate, grapes, raisins, onions, garlic)
- Medications (both prescription and over the counter)
- Toxic plants (e.g., lilies, azaleas, oleander)
- Tobacco and nicotine products
- Essential oils (e.g., tea tree, eucalyptus)
- Alcohol
- Food containing xylitol (a sweetener found in gum, candies, and some baked goods)

Watch for the following observable symptoms of poisoning:

- Excessive panting
- Impaired coordination or unsteady movements
- Trembling or shaking,
- Elevated heart rate
- Vomiting
- Lethargy or extreme tiredness.

Note: For questions or requests for supplies, email the foster liaison at ACFosterProgram@dph.sbcounty.gov.

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Health Concerns and Emergencies, Continued

What to do if you suspect poisoning

If you suspect that your foster has been poisoned, take the following actions:

- Immediately contact your foster liaison or emergency veterinary services.
- Do not wait for symptoms to worsen; time is crucial.
- If possible, bring the suspected toxin or packaging with you to the veterinarian's office to help identify the substances and guide treatment.

By staying vigilant and being proactive, you can help ensure the safety and well-being of the foster puppy. The table below details potential toxins, observed symptoms, and additional information.

Toxin	Observed Symptoms	Additional Information
Chocolate, Coffee, Tea	Vomiting, diarrhea, abnormal heart rhythms, seizures	Treatment depends on the type and amount ingested
Xylitol	Collapse, vomiting, weakness, tremors, seizures, low body temp	Xylitol causes low blood sugar and liver damage
Grapes and Raisins	Vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, dehydration, decreased urination	Kidney damage can be severe; no known safe amount
Onions, Chives, Garlic	Vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, abdominal pain, drooling	Red blood cells are affected, causing anemia
Antifreeze (Ethylene Glycol)	Vomiting, seizures, excessive drooling, decreased coordination	Antidote is effective only within 8-12 hours

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Health Concerns and Emergencies, Continued

What to do if you suspect poisoning, Continued

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Toxin	Symptoms to look for	Additional Information
Rat poison	Vomiting blood, pale gums, nose bleeds, seizures, and bruising	May need a blood transfusion
Slug pellets (Metaldehyde)	Vomiting, increased heart rate, tremors, excessive salivation	No antidote. Requires rapid treatment
Avocado	Vomiting, diarrhea	The chemical substance responsible is called persin, which is present in the fruit, seeds, and leaves
Macadamia nuts	Vomiting, lethargy, joint stiffness, and weakness in the back legs	Symptoms last up to 48 hours and may vary in severity
Alcohol	Decreased coordination, tremors, vomiting, diarrhea	Alcohol poisoning can be fatal even in small amounts
Yeast dough	Vomiting, bloating, lethargy, and alcohol poisoning	Can cause gastric torsion or alcohol toxicity
Unsafe foods for dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bones can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and/or abdominal pain• Corn on the cob can cause vomiting and/or loss of appetite• High-fat foods can lead to vomiting, diarrhea, and/or lethargy	Avoid giving dogs access to table scraps. High-fat meals can lead to pancreatitis

Common Puppy Ailments

Common puppy ailments

The chart below summarizes common ailments foster puppies may experience.

Ailments	Symptoms	Causes	Recommended Actions
Diarrhea	Soft or liquid stool, dehydration, loss of appetite	Change in diet, bacteria, parasites, and stress	Keep the puppy hydrated. Consult the foster liaison if it persists > 24 hours
Constipation	Lack of bowel movement, discomfort, bloated abdomen	Dehydration, diet	Ensure hydration. Consult the foster liaison if the issue persists for more than 24 hours
Gastrointestinal Parasites	Diarrhea, bloated abdomen, blood in stool, worms in feces, poor weight gain	Transmitted via the mother or the environment	Deworm the puppy as advised. Consult the foster liaison
Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)	Nasal congestion, sneezing, red/swollen eyes, fever, lethargy	Viral or bacterial infection	Contact the foster liaison immediately. Monitor for severe symptoms
Ringworm	Flaky, bald patches, redness, itching on ears, paws, and head	Fungal skin infection, highly contagious	Isolate puppy, wear gloves, wash hands and bedding regularly. Contact the foster liaison immediately
Fleas	Excessive itching, black flea dirt, visible fleas	Flea infestation	Flea bath with Dawn® Soap, and comb with flea comb. Consult the foster liaison for further treatment

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Common Puppy Ailments, Continued

Common puppy ailments, Continued

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Ailments	Symptoms	Causes	Recommended Actions
Mange	Itching, hair loss, open sores, restlessness	Skin mites, some types can be contagious to humans or other animals	Contact the foster liaison immediately if suspected
Canine Parvo Virus (Parvo)	Lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea (with or without blood), loss of appetite	Viral infection, highly contagious	Contact the foster liaison immediately

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to review this informative packet. Your dedication to fostering is vital in providing a nurturing environment for these young animals as they begin their journey toward finding a forever home. If you have any questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the foster liaison team. The foster liaison team is available during business hours or can be reached via email at ACFosterProgram@dph.sbcounty.gov.

For information on returning your foster puppy for adoption, refer to the general Pet Foster Manual for guidelines. For details on cleaning between litters, refer to the sanitation procedures outlined in the general Pet Foster Manual for proper cleaning procedures.

