

Feline Health Basics

Monitoring Cat Health

Monitoring each animal's health in cattery is major component of caring for the cats in our care and working toward getting them adopted. Daily monitoring dramatically improves the likelihood that signs of problems will be identified early and will be resolved quickly.

- Before feeding and cleaning in the morning, take note of any signs of inappetence, excessive drinking, unusual urination (too much/too little/outside of the box), vomiting, or diarrhea. This could be easily missed if not done before the normal morning activities.
- Remind volunteers daily to alert you to any signs of illness. Do not rely on them, however, since they will not be as familiar with signs of cat health issues.
- Make sure that every animal in a group room is observed eating on a daily basis. Separate any animal that does not eat from the group, try offering different food, and follow hunger strike protocol if inappetence persists.
- If diarrhea, abnormal urine, vomit, etc. is observed in a group room, perform a careful physical exam on each animal to determine which one(s) are affected.
- If any member of a litter is observed to have symptoms of a possibly contagious illness, isolation precautions should be taken for the entire litter.
- Do not group house animals with medical conditions requiring close monitoring.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS:

Please notify a manager on duty as well as the clinic if you notice the following:

- Prolonged hunger striking
- Immobilized cat
- Open-mouthed breathing
- Labored breathing / panting
- Vomit & diarrhea simultaneously

General Symptoms of Illness To Watch For:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diarrhea • Sneezing • Eye discharge (clear, yellow, green) • Dehydration (skin tenting) • Coughing/hacking • Persistent Vomiting • Lethargy • Difficulty urinating or defecating • Urinating outside of the litter box • Excessive licking or scratching • Swollen abdomen • Limping • Lumps • Marked weight gain or loss • Sudden change in behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden change in appetite • Inflammation or swelling • Itchy ears • Hair loss (especially if it is round and skin is crusty, scaly, etc.) • Bleeding • Pale gums • Difficulty walking/moving • Rapid breathing • Bad breath • Difficulty eating • Soreness / unusual physical sensitivity • Pawing at ears, eyes, or mouth • Drooling • Tremors / uncontrolled shaking
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Common Illnesses + Questions to Consider When Writing Illness Forms:

- Diarrhea:
 - Potential causes:
 - Food change? Abrupt changes in food can lead to soft stool
 - Coccidia→ especially awful! smelly particularly foul, grainy in appearance
 - Parasites
 - Recent deworming
 - Provide full description on illness form:
 - Consistency? watery, toothpaste, cow patty, etc.
 - Color?
 - Blood present?
 - Sample Collection Protocol: Provide a sample for the clinic to analyze. Use plastic bag from the third drawer, properly labeled with cat's name, ID#, date. If sample is not refrigerated it has to be analyzed immediately.
 - Common Treatments: metronidazole, panacur, marquis paste, tylan powder, probiotics, pen-g
- Tapeworms:
 - Looks like rice
 - Often found on or around butt area
 - Commonly Treatments: praziquantel/virbantel/cestex
- Upper Respiratory Infection: (URI)
 - Nasal discharge? yellow or green indicates infection
 - Ocular discharge? yellow or green indicates infection
 - Sneezing
 - Lethargy
 - Is the cat currently eating? Cats who cannot smell their food due to URI are more likely to stop eating. This can be super dangerous so keep a close eye on this and follow hunger strike protocol if you notice a cat with URI who stops eating!
 - Wheezing? Congested?
 - Mouth breathing = immediate emergency!
 - Common Treatments: doxycycline, azithromycin/zithromax, lysine
- Limping:
 - Avoiding the use of one leg?
 - Notes about previous injury?
 - Does it seem painful?
 - Avoiding jumping, running, etc?
 - When did it start?
- Eye problems:
 - Red, inflamed conjunctiva
 - Entropion
 - Scarring/clouding
- Ear Mites:
 - Appearance like coffee grounds
 - Frequent itching at ears
 - Shaking head
 - Scabs around ears
 - Common Treatment: Ivermectin applied to each ear
- Hairloss:
 - Overgrooming? Thinning fur over large area, usually flank, belly, etc.
 - Ringworm symptoms? Round? Scaly or crusty? Blacklight positive?
 - One spot or several?g
 - Scarred skin will often appear smooth without hair

- On shoulder blades/back of neck? Could be a reaction to flea preventatives

Healing Post-Spay/Neuter Surgery:

- If spay site feels soft and mushy, let the clinic know immediately!
- Spay site should feel hard. Most cats get lumps up to the size of a pecan.
- Yellow pus = bad!
- Hotter than rest of body = bad!
- Shouldn't be painful to the touch for kitty

Glossary of Veterinary Terms

(for interpreting records in PP)

- **Abrasion** - An injury that has occurred in which one or more of the topmost layers of the skin are scraped away. Also known as a scrape.
- **Abscess** - A localized infection, usually a lesion filled with pus. Can be large or small in size.
- **Acute** - Having a sudden and generally severe onset. See also chronic.
- **Alopecia** - A condition of hair loss resulting in either complete baldness or patches of baldness.
- **Ascites** - The collection of fluid in the peritoneal cavity.
- **Aspirate** - a) inhaling b) getting out fluid or gas by the act of sucking.
- **Ataxia** - A medical condition in which an animal is unable to control the movements of their muscles; may result in collapse or stumbling.
- **Atopy** - An allergy to something that is inhaled such as pollen or house dust. Also called 'inhalant allergy'.
- **Aural** - referring to the ear
- **BUN** - Short for 'blood urea nitrogen', a blood test that estimates kidney function
- **Cardiomyopathy** - Diseases of the heart muscle; does not include diseases of the valves of the heart or congenital defects.
- **Caudal, or posterior** - toward the animal's butt
- **Congenital** - A characteristic of an animal that is present at birth. It may be inherited or induced by events that occur during pregnancy.
- **Cataracts** - Loss of transparency of the lens of the eye. Can be genetic or acquired as the result of injury or diabetes, etc.
- **Cryptorchid** - an animal with one or two undescended testicles.
- **Cranial, or anterior** - toward the animal's head
- **Culture** - The process in which a sample of fluid or tissue is taken from an animal and placed in special media which allows the bacteria, virus, etc. to grow (reproduce) in the laboratory.
- **Cyst** - An abnormal sac structure containing fluid.
- **Dermatitis** - An inflammation of the skin.
- **Distal** - The furthest distance from the middle or the top of a body
- **Dorsal** - toward the animal's back
- **Edema** - A condition in which the tissues of the body contain too much body fluid. The fluid accumulation may cause swelling in the affected area.
- **Echocardiogram** - The image produced by performing an ultrasound examination of the heart.
- **Ectoparasite** - A parasite that lives on the outside surface or skin of another animal. Include fleas, ticks, lice, and mange mites.
- **Ectopic** - Non-malignant tissue growing in an unusual location (e.g., an ectopic pregnancy is conception of a normal embryo outside the normal location, which is the uterus).
- **Electrocardiogram (EKG)** - A printout of an analysis of the electrical activity in the heart.
- **Emesis** -Vomiting.
- **Emetic** - agent that decreases or stops vomiting.
- **Entropion** - eyelids turn inward causing hair to irritate the surface of the eye. Normally requires surgical correction, and sometimes requires multiple surgeries.
- **Gastritis** - Inflammation of the stomach.

- **Gastroenteritis** - An upset of the gastrointestinal system usually from ingestion of toxic or non-food items, causing acute vomiting and diarrhea which can lead to severe dehydration.
- **Gingival** - Relating to the gums
- **Haunches** - back legs of an animal
- **Hematoma** – localized collection of blood, a lump.
- **Hepatitis** - An inflammation or infection of the liver.
- **Hernia** - The protrusion of an organ through an abnormal opening.
- **Hyperthyroidism** - A condition in which the thyroid gland produces too much thyroid hormone.
- **Idiopathic** – no known cause
- **Immunodeficiency** - Reduced function of the immune system of an animal, making it more susceptible to infectious disease. Can be an inherited defect or caused by drugs, radiation or viruses.
- **Inflammation** - A condition in which tissue reacts to injury and undergoes changes during the healing process. As an example, a toe with a sliver of wood in it would be inflamed and show the signs of inflammation which include redness, increased temperature, pain, swelling and a loss of or disordered function. The toe is swollen, red, hot, painful, and the animal is reluctant to walk on that toe.
- **Intramuscular** - Into the muscle (IM).
- **Intravenous** - Into a the blood stream via a vein.
- **Jaundice** - The condition in which there is a build up of waste products in the body called bilirubin. Bilirubin is yellow in color, therefore an animal with jaundice will have yellow gums, skin (often seen on the inside flap of the ear), and a yellowish cast to the 'whites' of the eyes. It can occur if a large number of red blood cells are destroyed, the liver is not functioning normally, or the bile ducts are blocked.
- **Killed vaccine** - Vaccines which are made by taking the real, disease-causing viruses (or bacteria), killing them, and putting them into a liquid base.
- **Lacrimation** - the secretion of tears, especially in abnormal abundance
- **Lateral** - toward the animal's side
- **Lateral torsion** – twisted or rotated out.
- **Liver Shunt** - Abnormal condition where the blood bypasses the liver.
- **Lymph Nodes** - Part of the immune system of an animal. Small masses of tissue that contain white blood cells called lymphocytes. Blood from the nearby area is filtered through the lymph node allowing foreign or infectious material to be recognized and destroyed if possible.
- **Malignant** - A process that does harm to nearby tissues. Usually synonymous with cancer, a tumor that grows quickly and spreads both in the original area where it occurred and in remote parts of the body.
- **Mange** - Any of several skin and ear conditions caused by a variety of mites.
- **Mastitis** – inflammation of the mammary gland, usually due to bacterial infection.
- **Medial** - toward the midline of the animal's body
- **Metastasis** - Spread of a tumor from its original location to a remote one, by tumor cells that are carried in the blood.
- **Nebulization** - The making of a fine mist; usually used to administer certain drugs
- **Necrotic** - Having to do with dead tissue
- **Otic** - Pertaining to the ear.
- **Palpation** - To examine with the hands or fingers.
- **Pancreatitis** - Inflammation of the pancreas, a severe and sometimes life threatening disease often associated with eating fatty foods. Signs include vomiting and a painful abdomen.
- **Pathogenic**- Causing disease.
- **Plaque** - A build-up of bacteria, saliva and food on the teeth. Also known as 'Tartar'.
- **Pneumonia** - In cats, refers to inflammation within the lung tissue. Pneumonia can be caused by an infection or irritation in the lungs.
- **Prolapsed Rectum** - because of irritation or injury, the inner part of the rectum is pushed out so that it is visible as a pink mass protruding from the anal opening.

- **Proximal** - situated nearer to the center of the body or the point of attachment
- **Pulmonary edema** - Fluid accumulation in the lungs.
- **Pulmonary emboli/embolism** - Blood clot that travels to the blood vessels in the lung and obstructs them.
- **Renal** - anything having to do with the kidneys
- **Sarcoma** - Cancer in connecting tissues. In dogs and cats sarcoma usually refers to tumors in the soft tissue.
- **Seborrhea** – abnormal secretion of the sebaceous glands at the base of hair follicles causing anything from dandruff to greasy scales and crust.
- **Septic** - A condition caused by an infection e.g., with bacteria or fungi, or toxins they produce.
- **Shedding (of organisms)** - A term used to describe the release of organisms (bacteria, protozoa, viruses) into the environment from an infected animal. The organisms may be in the stool, urine, respiratory secretions, or vaginal discharges. The 'shedding' animal may or may not be showing symptoms of disease.
- **Subcutaneous** - Under the skin; often called 'sub Q'.
- **Symblepharon** - Adhesion of conjunctiva to either another conjunctival surface or to the cornea of the eye, commonly caused by herpes virus
- **Systemic** - Throughout the body.
- **Topical** - To be used on the skin.
- **Urinalysis** - An in-depth examination of the properties of urine; used to determine the presence or absence of illness
- **Ventral** - toward the animal's belly
- **Virulent** - Having the strength to cause disease; deadly in nature; pathogenic
- **Zoonotic** - A disease which can be transmitted between animals and people.

Zoonotic Diseases

A zoonotic disease is an infection that is naturally transmitted from vertebrate animals to human beings. For the protection of shelter staff and volunteers as well as that of the public, it is critical that animal shelter professionals be familiar with the most common zoonotic threats in a shelter environment, and the general principles of preventing transmission of zoonotic disease.

A **fomite** is any inanimate object that can spread disease. Fomites include hands, dishes, and tools such as grooming implements and poop scoopers.

- Hands should be washed and disinfected after animal contact, including indirect contact from cleaning cages, handling dishes or litter pans. Disposable gloves may be used as well.
- Toys, blankets and dishes should be machine washed or discarded between animals, or should go home with newly adopted animals.
- Areas that multiple animals pass through each day, such as "getting acquainted" areas where animals and adopters meet, should ideally be cleaned after each use and thoroughly disinfected at least once a day
- Feces should be cleaned up at least once a day from runs and cages, and should be removed immediately from common play areas and disposed of properly.
- Routine disinfection should be performed using agents effective against most bacteria and viruses. This can be done with a thorough cleaning with Simple Green followed by 10 minutes of wet contact time with 1:32 bleach solution. Be aware that some agents, such as ringworm and many parasitic infestations, require more rigorous or specific disinfection procedures.

Zoonotic diseases spread by bites and scratches:

Rabies	Dogs, Cats
Dog and Cat Bites (Pasteurella and Capnocytophaga infection)	Cats, dogs
Bartonellosis (Cat Scratch Fever)	Cats, dogs

Zoonotic skin infections:

Ringworm	Cats, dogs
Scabies (sarcoptic mange)	Cats, dogs
Cheyletiellosis	Cats, dogs

Zoonotic diseases found in the gastrointestinal tract of animals:

Campylobacteriosis	Dogs, cats, many other mammalian and avian species.
Giardiasis	Dogs, cats
Hookworm	Dogs, cats
Roundworm	Dogs, cats, raccoons
Salmonellosis	Reptiles, many other species including dogs and cats
Toxoplasmosis	Cats