

Crashing Kitten and Puppy Emergency Protocol



What is “Fading Syndrome”?

Fading Kitten Syndrome or Fading Puppy Syndrome is a set of symptoms that are associated with failure to thrive in kittens and puppies between 0-4 weeks of age. A blood infection is the most common cause of “Fading Syndrome.” Kittens and puppies, especially orphans, might not receive enough first milk (colostrum), which contains protective antibodies against infection. This causes the kittens and puppies to be more susceptible to viral and bacterial infections. Other causes of “Fading Syndrome” include maternal neglect, improper nutrition, dehydration, low body temperature, low blood sugar, birth defects, and intestinal parasites. Recognizing the symptoms early can allow intervention before the kitten or puppy “crashes” (becomes unresponsive).

Fading Syndrome Symptoms:

- Failure to meet normal developmental milestones
- Not nursing or not getting enough milk from the mother
- Not gaining weight/losing weight
 - Kittens should be gaining 0.25 lbs (4 oz) per week, or 0.6 oz. per day. Puppies should be gaining 5-10% of their body weight per day, resulting in doubling their body weight every 10-14 days.
- Hypothermia (Low Body Temperature) – Feeling cool or cold to the touch, particularly in limbs/extremities
 - Normal Neonatal Temperatures: 95-99°F (0-1 week), 97-100°F (2-3 weeks), 99-101°F (4 weeks)
- Severe Lethargy – Barely moving, difficulty holding head up, lying flat out, not responsive
- Labored Breathing – Exaggerated breathing, often with mouth open.
- Excessive Vocalizing – Particularly loud, pained cries combined with any of the above symptoms.

Crashing Kitten and Puppy Emergency Protocol: In many instances, a crashing kitten or puppy will not survive, even with medical intervention, however, taking these steps **immediately** will give the best prognosis!

1. **PROVIDE WARMTH** – Wrap the kitten or puppy in a blanket or towel, leaving only their face exposed. Use a heat source (Snuggle Safe, heating pad) as an extra source of heat.
 - Make sure the heat source is not directly touching the kitten or puppy to prevent burns.
 - Don’t have a heat source? Put uncooked rice into a clean sock, knot the end and microwave for 2-3 minutes.
 - No microwave? Put hot (not boiling) water into a doubled-up Ziploc bag.
2. **INCREASE BLOOD SUGAR** – Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) can cause a kitten or puppy to be very lethargic, and it can also cause seizures in extreme cases. While warming the kitten or puppy, apply light Karo corn syrup to the gums. If Karo is not available, use maple syrup or mix equal parts sugar and warm water until dissolved. Use a syringe or your finger to place a few drops of the sugar source into the kitten or puppy’s mouth **EVERY 3 MINUTES**. Go slow to ensure the kitten or puppy is swallowing to avoid inhalation into the lungs. If swallowing, feed the kitten or puppy the sugar source. If not swallowing, apply it with a Q-tip to the gums. You should see improvement in ~20 minutes if low blood sugar is the cause.
3. One of the most important advanced skills a foster parent should learn is how to **ADMINISTER WARM FLUIDS SUBCUTANEOUSLY (UNDER THE SKIN)**. Give 10 ml per 1 lb of body weight. Give 5 ml for 0.5 lbs or smaller. Give 10ml for 0.5 lbs-1 lb. Our Foster Care team can give you a tutorial, and then you’ll be equipped to start saving lives. This is the one skill that can make or break a kitten or puppy’s chances, so please learn!
 - a. If you don’t have access to fluids, you can also help by syringe-feeding a 50:50 mixture of **warm** milk replacer and flavorless Pedialyte to the kitten or puppy. This will help restore hydration and electrolytes to the system. Be careful to go slow to avoid inhalation into the lungs (aspiration).
 - b. If you aren’t trained to give fluids or do not have access to fluids, reach out to your volunteer Foster Mentor if you have been assigned one.
4. **DURING NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS** – Bring the animal to the shelter immediately (refer to the Foster Emergency Care Protocol) or call your Foster Mentor for help. If the kitten or puppy has not begun to improve within an hour, their chance of survival is often poor. If the kitten or puppy does not survive, please know that you have done everything that you could and most likely there are other underlying, non-treatable issues.

Refer to the Maddie’s Fund Emergencies Handouts and the SafeHaven Foster Pet Emergency Info Sheet for more information.