



## How to Check Foster Pets for Dehydration

Dehydration occurs when a pet's body is losing more water than it is taking in. Common causes are vomiting, diarrhea, illness, heat stroke, and/or lack of water intake. Dehydration is a serious medical issue. The good news is that it is easily treated with fluids given either under the skin or through a catheter inserted into a vein. However, veterinary care is essential to address the cause of the dehydration and prevent it from happening again. It is helpful for foster caregivers to know how to check foster pets for dehydration, and to understand which signs of dehydration warrant emergency veterinary care.

### Assessing Hydration Status in Cats and Dogs (5 weeks of age and older)

- Skin tent test
  - Pick up the skin between your pet's shoulder blades with your fingers and then drop it.
  - If the skin snaps back into place quickly, within 1-2 seconds, then your foster pet is likely well hydrated.
  - If the skin takes longer than 1-2 seconds to sink back down into place, your cat or dog is likely dehydrated.
- Moistness of the gums
  - Rub your finger along your pet's gums.
  - If the gums feel wet and slippery, your foster pet is likely well hydrated.
  - If the gums feel sticky, then he or she is most likely dehydrated.
- Sunken-in eyes
  - In severe cases of dehydration, your foster pet's eyes may have a sunken-in appearance.

### Assessing Hydration Status in Kittens and Puppies (0-4 weeks)

- It can be difficult to assess the hydration status in kittens and puppies from 0-4 weeks of age because their bodies are still developing, and their skin and kidneys are immature.
- Skin tent test: unreliable.
  - The skin of very young kittens and puppies has an increased water content and a decreased fat content compared to adults, so the skin tent test is unreliable.



- Moistness of the gums: more reliable.
  - If the gums feel wet and slippery, it is likely that he or she is well hydrated, although it is not a guarantee.
  - If the gums feel sticky, he or she is likely dehydrated.
  - It is important to note that with very young kittens and puppies, sticky gums may not occur until they are very severely dehydrated.
- Color of the pee: less reliable.
  - Since very young kittens and puppies have immature kidney function, their pee is normally colorless and clear. So, when they are dehydrated, you may notice that the pee is a darker yellow in color. However, this color change does not always happen. Do not wait for this sign before assuming your kitten or puppy is dehydrated.
- Assume dehydration: most reliable.
  - Monitor very young kittens or puppies for a lack of appetite and any signs of illness. Assume that they are dehydrated if there is a lack of liquid intake from not nursing, if there are more than 1-2 episodes of vomiting or diarrhea, and/or if they are sick or lethargic. Lethargic means weakness and a lack of energy.

## When to Seek Veterinary Care:

- Contact your Foster Manager when....
  - You think your foster pet is dehydrated. Your Foster Manager will then determine whether subcutaneous fluids (fluids given underneath the skin) will be enough, or if emergency veterinary care is warranted, based on the severity of the dehydration and the age of the foster pet.
  - Your foster pet 5 weeks and older is mildly dehydrated. Your foster pet's skin is a little slow to go down when lifted or the gums are slightly sticky. A physical exam by a foster mentor or another member of the veterinary team is needed. They can help determine the cause of the dehydration and whether or not subcutaneous fluids will be enough to rehydrate your foster pet.
- When it's an emergency...
  - Your foster pet 5 weeks and older is very dehydrated. Your foster pet's skin is very slow to go back down after the skin tent test, and the gums are very sticky. In more severe cases of dehydration, the eyes will have a sunken-in appearance. It is likely that your foster pet will need fluids given through a catheter inserted into the vein; this is typically called an "intravenous" or "IV" catheter.



- Your kitten or puppy between 0-4 weeks is dehydrated or assumed to be. Dehydration is a much more serious concern at this age since their bodies are still immature and incapable of responding to dehydration in the same way as older foster pets.
  - If their gums are sticky or their pee is yellow in color, they are definitely dehydrated. However, remember that very young kittens and puppies can be very dehydrated and still have moist gums and colorless, clear pee.
  - You can assume kittens or puppies at this age are dehydrated if they have decreased liquid intake from not nursing, have more than 1-2 episodes of vomiting or diarrhea, or appear sick or lethargic. Lethargic means weakness or lack of energy.
  - If they are exhibiting any of the definite or assumed signs of dehydration, they need: emergency veterinary care, fluid therapy, and nutritional support.

