



Diarrhea

What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea is unfurmed/loose stool, often noted with an increased urgency to defecate and frequency of defecation. Diarrhea alone is not an illness, but it can be a sign of an illness. There are many causes for why your foster may be experiencing diarrhea and different levels of severity.

What are some causes of diarrhea?

Diarrhea can have many causes, many of which we see in shelter animals. This list isn't exhaustive, and remember - there may be multiple causes working together to cause GI upset in shelter animals.

- Food changes - most animals are changed to different food when they come to the shelter. For owner surrenders, they may have been used to a previous food and will take time to acclimate to a new diet. For strays, they may have been foraging for food and eating small animals, human food, or garbage. For kittens or puppies, the transition from mother's milk to formula, gruel, or canned food can cause GI upset.
- Parasites - many animals come into the shelter with little-to-no veterinary care history, and have parasites like roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, and/or coccidia.
- Stress/excitement/change - even though we try to keep animals' stress levels as low as possible, the shelter is still a stressful environment. The change from a shelter animals' previous life, to the shelter, to a foster home is a lot to go through and often we'll see GI upset in the first few days of a transition.
- Parvovirus/Panleukopenia - these viruses generally cause severe, bloody, leaking diarrhea that often has a very strong odor. Often, we see vomiting and a lack of appetite along with severe diarrhea.

What should I do?

- Don't change your fosters' diet or feed any human foods unless specifically directed by the foster team.
- Make sure there are no plants your foster pets can chew on - even plants that are not toxic can still cause GI upset.
- If their stool is a score of 4 or less there's no need to worry!
- If their stool is a score of 5 or 6, it's ok to monitor for a few days to see if it resolves on its own (especially if you just brought your foster home). If loose stool doesn't resolve on its own after 3-4 days, or is worsening, send an email or a text to the foster team. We'll likely have you drop off a fecal sample that we'll examine under the microscope as a first step.
- If their stool is a score of 7, or your foster is leaking diarrhea, send an email or a text to the foster team. Depending on the severity, we may have you drop off a fecal sample or we may have your foster pet come in for an evaluation to determine the best course of action.
- **If your foster is under 5 weeks old and has severe, leaking diarrhea or severe, bloody diarrhea - contact us ASAP (day or night). Neonatal kittens are much more delicate and diarrhea/dehydration needs to be addressed ASAP.**
- If your kitten or puppy is over 5 weeks old and is eating and otherwise acting normal, it's ok to wait until business hours to reach out about score 7 diarrhea.



How do I collect a fecal?








- Pick up the sample as soon as your pet defecates. If it's going to be more than about two hours before you can bring the sample to us, please keep it refrigerated. It's ok to refrigerate a fecal for up to 12 hours before dropping it off, but the fresher the sample the better!
- We don't need much to run a fecal - about a teaspoon is ideal!
- It's ok if there's some litter, grass, dirt, or gravel present.
- If your foster's stool is totally liquid, just do your best with getting a sample. Sucking liquid stool up in a syringe can work (if you have one available).
- If you're unable to collect a fecal, let us know! We can schedule a time for your foster to come in and we can attempt to obtain a sample here.

It usually takes about 20-30 minutes for us to run a fecal and get dewormer (or other appropriate medications) ready. If you're unable to wait for medication, we can give you a call once we have results and a medication plan!

Additional information:

- If you're not sure what score the stool is or aren't sure if you should be concerned, take a photo and send it to the medical team!
- If you see visible worms in stool, vomit, or around your foster's anus, try to take a photo and send it to the medical team for identification. If you can't take a photo, send us a description of what you're seeing so we can get you an appropriate dewormer.
- Blood in stool can be alarming, but if it is a very small amount / streak of blood it's ok to simply monitor.
 - If blood in the stool is present for more than a day, reach out to the medical team for advice. Again, photos are always helpful so we can see what you're seeing!
- If diarrhea is accompanied by vomiting, lethargy, or a lack of appetite, always reach out to the foster team so we can get your fosters feeling better ASAP.
- Always finish all medication courses as prescribed, **even if symptoms seem to be improving or resolving**. Alert the foster team if you miss a dose or misplace or run out of any medications before a course is finished.

Fecal Scoring Chart (from Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets)

SCORE	SPECIMEN EXAMPLE	CHARACTERISTICS
1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Very hard and dry · Often expelled as individual pellets · Requires much effort to expel from body · Leaves no residue on ground when picked up
2	<div>IDEAL</div> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Firm, but not hard, pliable · Segmented in appearance · Little or no residue on ground when picked up
3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Log shaped, moist surface · Little or no visible segmentation · Leaves residue on ground, but holds form when picked up
4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Very moist and soggy · Log shaped · Leaves residue on ground and loses form when picked up
5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Very moist but has a distinct shape · Present in piles rather than logs · Leaves residue on ground and loses form when picked up
6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Has texture, but no defined shape · Present as piles or spots · Leaves residue on ground when picked up
7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Watery · No texture · Present in flat puddles