



Fast Facts

Neonatal Kittens and Fleas

It is critically important to perform a thorough intake exam on all kittens, including using a flea comb. No jumping fleas were noted on the kitten at the top right; however, upon combing, a lot of flea dirt became visible. Upon bathing, many live fleas were revealed.

Fleas can be deadly to a neonatal kitten. As long as there are no open wounds, it is important to bathe the kitten when fleas and/or flea dirt are seen since over-the-counter and prescribed flea treatments are not made for use on neonatal kittens. Bathing neonatal kittens is an important skill to learn and to become confident in performing — it can save a kitten's life.

We recommend using a very small amount of Dawn dish soap with warm water. Part of the bath will require that fleas be removed if they don't wash away. Do not be surprised if the fleas move toward the head and face during the bathing process. Be ready with your flea comb and tweezers to get them as they move up!

Once the kitten is free of fleas, be sure to dry gently and thoroughly with a towel. You can also use a hair dryer on the lowest setting, and be sure that it is not too close. It's a good idea to gently buff the kitten dry keeping your hand moving between the kitten and the dryer to ensure the heat is not too hot or too direct for the kitten. You may not get all of the fleas, especially due to the lifecycle of a flea, so you may need to repeat the bath in a few days.

Be careful and check that the kitten is not chilled after the bath by including a SnuggleSafe or other safe warming device (placed under only half of the housing area). Remember, neonatal kittens cannot regulate their own body temperatures. It's also a good idea to wash bedding in hot water and to dry it thoroughly to kill fleas and their eggs — do this daily. Make sure other adult animals in the household are on a flea preventative (a good practice if you are fostering), and be sure to read the label. Many products for dogs are not safe for kittens or cats. Keep all felines away from recently treated canines or be sure the product used on the dog is also safe for cats and kittens.

Pictured at the bottom right is the same kitten after a thorough drying and a good meal!

