



Fast Facts

Hypothermia in Neonatal Kittens

Hypothermia is a major cause of neonatal kitten death. Because kittens cannot self regulate their body temperature until about four weeks of age, ambient temperature can significantly affect their survival. Without mom to keep them warm, body functions may begin to shut down as their core temperature decreases. Kittens should feel warm when you pick them up. With a cold kitten, warming is the absolute first priority as cold kittens cannot metabolize food or medications. Do NOT feed a cold kitten as this is dangerous and may even lead to death. Begin warming immediately with consistent moderate, not extreme, heat. Holding kittens against your body is only a partially helpful emergency measure as our body temperature is lower than the 100-102 degrees F that a kitten's body temperature should ideally be. Get the kitten to a veterinarian as quickly as possible even if responding to the warming techniques.

Orphaned Kittens Temperature Chart¹

| Age of Kitten | Rectal Temperature | Ambient Nest Temperature | Room Humidity |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 0–1 weeks | 95–99 °F | 85–90 °F | 55–60% |
| 2–3 weeks | 97–100 °F | 79–84 °F | 55–60% |
| 4 weeks | 99–101 °F | 73.5–79 °F | 55–60% |

Tips for Warming Kittens

- ◆ Use a warm (not hot) SnuggleSafe, heating pad on low, warm water bottle, heated rice bag, etc.
- ◆ All heat sources should be covered with a towel so as to moderate the heat and prevent direct contact with the kittens. Be sure warming devices cover only a portion of the kittens' environment so they can crawl away if they become too warm.
- ◆ Constantly monitor the kitten's temperature, and adjust the little one's position to warm all areas of the body.
- ◆ Never leave a debilitated kitten alone with a heat source as overheating and burns may occur.
- ◆ Get the kitten to a veterinarian ASAP – even if the kitten seems to be responding to the warming techniques. A thorough exam will be needed to help determine if the kitten suffered any temporary or permanent injury to its organ systems and if additional treatment is needed.

¹Temperature chart from Maddie's Fund (www.maddiesfund.org)

