



Kitten Tutor™: Tips for Dispensing Medication

As we gear up for kitten season, many of us are purchasing medications we expect we will need to treat our tiny charges. Only a veterinarian can diagnose, determine a treatment plan and prescribe the medications/dosings that should be given. Don't use leftover medications from a previous foster with a new foster unless directed to do so by your vet, as what may have been prescribed for one kitten could be harmful for another. So, assuming your veterinarian has approved the purchase of bulk medication for distribution by a foster program manager or medical staff member for use with several kittens, here are some things to keep in mind:

Use the right container and label it. Some medicines may be light or heat sensitive or need refrigeration. As you portion bulk meds for your fosters, use the correct container to assure the medications remain effective and LABEL the containers correctly with the name of the medication, concentration, dosing info, storage protocol, directions such as "shake well," expiration date and what is used to treat. NEVER hand out an unlabeled medication.

Be clear about the concentration, particularly if you purchase supplies at your local farm store. For example, many medications like pyrantel (Strongid), sulfadimethoxine (Albon) and ponazuril (Marquis Paste) used for horses, cows and other large animals come in a different concentration than that prescribed for small animals. "Concentration" is the number of milligrams (mg) of drug per milliliter (mL) or similar measurements with tablets. So 90 mg/mL will be dosed differently than 120 mg/mL. Have the proper supplies to measure in very small increments.

Make sure your fosters understand how to deliver/administer the meds. Caregivers should be told the dose (amount – making sure they note the huge difference between 0.01 mL, 0.1 mL and 1.0 mL), frequency, duration and treatment protocol (if/when second dose is needed/due, give with food, shake well, apply topically, etc.) and identify someone they can call with questions. Press-in bottle adapters make dispensing liquid medicines accurately relatively easy, and fosters must be informed about protocols to keep medications from being contaminated (i.e. no double dipping that oral syringe!). It is also good to let fosters, especially new fosters, know if there are any possible side effects to watch for like loose stool, loss of appetite or vomiting - and what to do if they notice them.

Medicines are almost always dosed by weight, *not* age, so remember to **weigh the kittens before dosing medicines.** Even over-the-counter meds that may say "safe at 4 weeks of age," for example, are usually based on what a healthy kitten would *weigh* at that age since, unlike fosters, most pet owners are not weighing their pets daily. So their safety parameters are based on a healthy 4 week old weighing about a pound, not the 10 or 12 ounce 4 week old kitten that we so often see in rescue. And as kittens grow, their medication dosage may also need to be adjusted accordingly.

"Off label" and OTC medications require some special notes. Many medications that veterinarians can prescribe are "off label" for tiny kittens because there are so few studies done on kittens that age or condition with the particular medications. Veterinarians, however, can use their knowledge of veterinary medicine and pharmacology to determine what medications may be used and at what dose, frequency, etc. Furthermore, while many human OTC medications are often used on animals as well, not all are safe or usable for all animals. Just because something is available without a prescription does not mean it is safe. That is why it is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY to have a good working relationship with your veterinarian to discuss the use of any and every medication...even OTC.

Bottom line: Please consult with your veterinarian to set up your medical protocols and schedules for both Rx and OTC drugs. Read the labels, understand how to properly store and administer the medications, and learn everything you can about the meds you are giving your kittens: that is part of your responsibility as a caretaker.