

Should I Take in a Sick Kitten?

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, gives advice on how to treat ill kitten and what to ask the vet.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

Posted: March 20, 2009, 3 a.m. EDT

Q: I have a few questions for you about a kitten that showed up at my doorstep. It is hard for me to resist caring for animals. My house is filled with them! We have a tortoise, two iguanas, a dog, some fish and now two cats! My children want to keep this kitten but I have noticed that it has green gooey stuff coming from its eyes, it has had diarrhea, and you can feel every bone and rib in its body. We have fed it soft kitten food and gave it water. It looks to be about 1-2 months old. The kitten is very cute but I have children and other animals that I have invested a lot of time and money in, and I don't need them sick also! I called the local humane society but they have no more room for any more animals. I'm either stuck with it or it will die. Your advice is appreciated.

A: Well, it looks to me like you've got yourself a new kitten. There are a few things you need to do, however, before introducing this kitten into your home. Clearly, this little kitten is sick and needs veterinary attention. I suspect your cat has conjunctivitis, most likely secondary to a viral upper respiratory infection. You should take it to your veterinarian for treatment. These infections are contagious to other cats (but not to dogs or people). Be sure to bring a fecal sample with you to the vet because intestinal parasites are common in kittens and are likely to be a cause of the diarrhea. I'm sure your vet will prescribe medication for the respiratory infection, and will deworm the kitten as well. The most important thing is to determine the leukemia status of the kitten. If the kitten tests positive for feline leukemia virus, I would recommend against taking it in. If it tests negative, you should probably isolate the kitten until the respiratory infection and diarrhea has resolved. After that, you can introduce the kitten to the rest of the menagerie. Have your vet also make certain the kitten doesn't have fleas or ringworm, as these illnesses can infect your other cat and dog. Also, make certain your family cat is up to date on the distemper and upper respiratory virus vaccinations. There is nothing more rewarding than rescuing a sickly, homeless kitten, nursing it back to health, and making it a part of your family.