



What to Do if You Find a Litter of Kittens

Find a litter of kittens? Wait and call Greenhill first!

If you find a litter of kittens, first, watch and wait! A kitten's best chance of thriving is with its mother.

Momma Cat may be off finding food for herself or she may be in the process of actively moving her litter to another location. Try to determine if the mother is coming back for them, or if they are truly orphaned. Stand far away from the kittens — 35 feet or more. If you stand too close, the mom will not approach her kittens. You might need to go away completely before the mother cat will return to attend to the kittens. It might be several hours before the mother cat returns — until she no longer senses the presence of humans hovering near her litter.

If you need to leave before the mother cat comes back, carefully evaluate whether the kittens are in immediate danger: Is it raining or snowing? Are dogs or wild animals that might harm the kittens running loose in the neighborhood? Does the neighborhood have kids or adults who are likely to harm the kittens? Are the kittens located in an area with heavy foot or car traffic?

To help with your decision, it is important to know that it might take several hours for the mother cat to return, and healthy kittens can survive this period without food as long as they are warm. Neonatal kittens are just as much at risk of hypothermia as they are of starvation. During the spring and summer months, waiting a long time to see if mom will come back is much safer than during the frigid winter months.

The mother cat offers her newborn kittens their best chance for survival, so wait and watch as long as you safely can, and consult Greenhill Humane Society or your veterinarian before approaching or touching the kittens.

If the mother cat returns...

If mom returns and the area is relatively safe, leave the kittens alone with mom until they are weaned. You can offer shelter and regular food to mom, but keep the food and shelter at a distance from each other. Mom will find the food but will not accept your shelter if the food is nearby, because she will not want to attract other cats to food located near her nest.

Six weeks is the optimal age to intervene with additional care, such as socialization, vaccination, and deworming. Any time after eight weeks of age is after a kitten's socialization period – at that age or older, see our Trap-Neuter-Return¹ (spay/neuter, vaccination, eartip, and return to their colony).

Female cats can become pregnant with a new litter even while they are still nursing, so don't forget to get the mother cat spayed or you will have more kittens soon!

¹ <https://www.green-hill.org/spay-and-neuter-resources/>

If the mother cat does not return...

If you discover that the mom has been hit by a car or if for any reason it appears that she is not coming back, then please call Greenhill at 541.689.1503 for further guidance before picking up the kittens.