

## KITTENS

# Found Kittens Outside? What to Do First (New York)

Kittens alone outside are often not orphaned. How to check, when to wait, when to act, and who to call in Cattaraugus County.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 15, 2026 • 5 min read • 5 cited sources

**Need help with spay/neuter costs in Cattaraugus County?** Apply at [cattcountycatnippers.org/apply](https://cattcountycatnippers.org/apply) or call or text (716) 200-1283. Support this work at [cattcountycatnippers.org](https://cattcountycatnippers.org).

## Start here: sick, injured or in danger?

Most kittens found outdoors are not orphans, and the kindest thing is often to leave them where they are. The exception is a kitten that is sick, injured or in danger. Signs a kitten needs help now:

- Thin belly, gaunt face, ribs or spine showing
- Cold ears, belly or paws
- Pale gums and tongue
- Barely moving or very weak
- Heavily crusted eyes or nose
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Labored breathing
- Limping, wounds or sores, or crying out in pain

**A sick or injured kitten needs a veterinarian today. Call your vet or Veterinary Emergency Clinic, Cheektowaga at (716) 403-4370 (Open 24/7).**

## If the nest is in danger

- Immediate danger, such as flooding or fire: move the kittens to a safe spot outdoors, as close to the nest as you can, so their mother can find them.

- Danger that will last, such as a storm or extreme cold: bring the whole family into a small, quiet room (a bathroom works) or a dog crate covered with a blanket. Give them a carrier to hide in, food, water, and a litter box placed away from where they sleep and eat.

## If they look healthy: wait and watch

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Mother cats leave the nest to find food, and may stay away while people are nearby. Alley Cat Allies advises waiting several hours, or even a full day, to see whether she comes back. Watch from a hidden spot or from indoors, and keep people and pets away.

- Flour test: sprinkle a ring of flour around the nest. Paw prints in it mean the mother has been back.
- Kittens that are cuddled together, quiet, warm, clean, pink and round-bellied are being cared for, even if you never see her.
- If, after a careful wait, the kittens are cold, dirty or crying, or show any of the signs above, act now.

## How old are they?

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Age decides what kittens need. A kitchen scale helps: Kitten Lady's chart lists about 75–150 g at birth, 250–350 g at 2 weeks and 850–950 g at 8 weeks. Our [week-by-week growth guide](#) has the full chart.

- Under about 4 weeks: eyes closed or just opening (they begin to open at about 8–12 days), ears folded or small, wobbly or not yet walking. Needs its mother or round-the-clock bottle feeding.
- About 4 to 8 weeks: walking, running and playing; baby teeth coming in.
- About 8 weeks and older: eating on its own. Eyes start changing from baby blue to their adult color from about 7 weeks.

## Mom is there: leave them with her

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Do not take kittens younger than about 8 weeks from their mother. Do not bring the family indoors either: confinement can stress her and affect how she cares for them. Help from outside instead:

- Regular food and fresh water, with extra wet food while she is nursing.
- A sheltered, nest-like box nearby.
- Peace and quiet: keep dogs and other cats away, and do not approach the nest.

**Mother cat still outside? Spaying her stops the next litter. Apply for help with spay/neuter costs or call or text (716) 200-1283.**

## Why not the shelter?

Alley Cat Allies notes that most shelters do not have programs to care for unweaned kittens, and that shelters are not good places for mother cats and kittens. Best Friends Animal Society says kittens are usually safer outside with their mother than in a shelter. Some shelters run foster programs for young kittens, so if you need one, call and ask before you bring kittens in.

## Mom is gone: what to do tonight

If the mother has not come back after a careful wait, kittens 4 weeks and younger need special supplies and care around the clock.

1. Warm them first. A chilled kitten must be warmed slowly before any food. Use a heating pad on low, covered with a towel, under half of a box so they can move off it.
2. Feed only kitten milk replacer (KMR) from a pet store or vet, never cow's milk, with the kitten lying on its belly.
3. After each feeding, help kittens under about 4 weeks go to the bathroom by gently rubbing with a warm, damp cloth.
4. Weigh each kitten daily and write it down.
5. If you cannot care for them, ask friends, family, a local rescue or your veterinarian for help.

**Our newborn kitten care guide covers warmth, feeding and the warning signs that mean a same-day vet visit.**

## At about 8 weeks: spay/neuter and next steps

Alley Cat Allies recommends spaying or neutering kittens at 8 weeks old and at least 2 pounds, and spaying the mother at the same time so she does not get pregnant again. The AAFP recommends sterilizing cats not meant for breeding by 5 months of age, because cats can breed as early as 4 to 5 months. Your veterinarian decides the exact timing.

- Kittens raised outdoors by their mother: after surgery they can be ear-tipped and returned to their colony, or socialized and adopted if they are young and friendly enough.

- Kittens raised indoors before 8 weeks: should be adopted, not returned outdoors.
- The mother: spayed and returned home through TNR if she is feral; fostered or adopted if she is friendly.

**Socializing works best when kittens are young. Alley Cat Allies generally does not recommend it after about 4 months. See [socializing feral kittens](#).**

## Who to call in Cattaraugus County

- Sick or injured kitten, any hour: your veterinarian, or Veterinary Emergency Clinic, Cheektowaga, (716) 403-4370 (Open 24/7).
- Urgent care closer to home: Enchanted Mountains Urgent Veterinary Care, Olean, (716) 257-4830 (Fri-Mon 10am-8pm, text before arriving).
- The mother cat and the rest of the colony: call or text us at (716) 200-1283, or [apply online](#). We help Cattaraugus County caretakers with spay/neuter costs for community cats.
- Shelters and rescues: call before you bring kittens in. Intake and foster programs vary.

## Checklist

- ☐ Checked for signs of sickness or injury
- ☐ Watched from a hidden spot for several hours (flour ring down)
- ☐ Estimated age by weight and milestones
- ☐ Mother fed and sheltered, or kittens warmed before any feeding
- ☐ Vet and helper numbers saved
- ☐ Spay/neuter plan for the kittens and the mother at about 8 weeks

## Sources

1. [Alley Cat Allies — What to Do if You Find Kittens Outdoors](https://www.alleycat.org/community-cat-care/finding-kittens-outdoors/)  
<https://www.alleycat.org/community-cat-care/finding-kittens-outdoors/>
2. [Best Friends Animal Society — Found Kittens: What to Do](https://bestfriends.org/pet-care-resources/found-kittens-what-do)  
<https://bestfriends.org/pet-care-resources/found-kittens-what-do>
3. [Kitten Lady — How to Determine a Kitten's Age](https://www.kittenlady.org/age)  
<https://www.kittenlady.org/age>
4. [AAFP — 2020 Pediatric Sterilization in Cats \(position statement\)](https://catvets.com/guidelines/position-statements/pediatric-sterilization-position-statement)  
<https://catvets.com/guidelines/position-statements/pediatric-sterilization-position-statement>

## 5. ASPCA — Kitten Bottle Feeding Guide (PDF)

<https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/aspca-kitten-bottlefeeding-guide.pdf>