



Continuity of Care Guide for Your Cats During the COVID-19 Pandemic



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STATEMENT ON POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The policies and procedures in this document were created in April 2020 using the best practises at the time advocated by veterinarian associations, animal welfare groups and Toronto Public Health. The COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation and it is possible some of this information in this document will become obsolete in the future. Before involving yourself or others in a COVID-19 situation, you should request clarification from your local public health officials and veterinarian on how to proceed.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Todd Burgess is a lead volunteer with Toronto Cat Rescue in Toronto, Canada and has been involved in cat rescue for over seven years. Todd has had several management roles in Toronto Cat Rescue including the healthcare team, pet store adoption centres and adoptathons. Todd is a former funeral director with previous experience in infectious diseases and mass fatality events.

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CONTINUITY OF CARE GUIDE CONTENTS

This document contains:

1. A guide to organizing the continuity of care for your cats
2. A sign you can print for your residence and carry, alerting officials to contact your emergency foster person should you be unable to do so
3. A guide to organizing the actual care and instructions for your cats.
4. An emergency foster guide in case your emergency foster person has no to little cat experience

INTRODUCTION

With the COVID-19 pandemic upon us our lives have changed dramatically and it has forced us to confront a lot of new realities. One of the realities we must face is we could find ourselves too sick at home or in the hospital, unable to care for our cats. We must also be prepared for the eventuality that we could die as a result of the pandemic. Unfortunately with everything happening in the world, our cats are a low priority for others. Our beloved cats are only a priority if we make them one. The aim of this guide is to give you an emergency guide to ensure your cats get the care they need should you be unable to.

This guide contains many of the emergency procedures taken from the policies and procedures Toronto Cat Rescue uses to rescue cats in distress. The procedures have been modified to accommodate the realities of owned cats in the COVID-19 pandemic world we find ourselves in. Designating an emergency foster to care for your cats will be a difficult conversation so this guide will allow you to organize all your care instructions to aid you and your emergency foster person.

Hopefully none of the information laid out in this guide will need to be used for your cats. However if it is needed, your cats will appreciate that you took the time to organize their future.

If you have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus or believe you have come in contact with someone who was, you must consult with your doctor and veterinarian to discuss a treatment plan for you and your cats. This will ensure you and your cats are cared for using the most up to date best practises.

CONSIDERING THE TWO WORST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO OUR CATS IF WE DIE?

It is uncomfortable to say and to think about but there is the possibility that we might die as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This means our cats are going to outlive us. It would be good to know that our cats are going to end up in a new forever home where they will experience all the love and joy you give them now.

FINDING A NEW HOME FOR YOUR CATS

Should we pass away and our cats outlive us, our cats will need a new forever home. We do not want our cats to end up in a situation where others will make decisions about their future. When choosing a new forever home you are asking the forever home not just to take on your cats but all the time and financial burdens that come with owning cats. Be advised in today's current climate there could be a delay in your cats getting to their new forever home so emergency foster care may be needed. If you have two or more cats it may be necessary to split them up so that they have a better chance of finding an adoptive home. Give some consideration to what it might look like if your cats can not all live together.

When deciding on a future home for your cats consider the following possible options:

1. **Friends or family.** Ask your friends and family if they would take your cats should you no longer be able to.
2. **Toronto Cat Rescue.** If you adopted your cats from Toronto Cat Rescue all our cats have a lifetime return policy and Toronto Cat Rescue can rehome your cat. If you adopted from another animal rescue, find out if they will rehome your cat if you can no longer care for it.
3. **Purebred Cat Breeders.** If your cat is a purebred that you acquired from a reputable breeder they will rehome their purebred cat.
4. **Emergency foster home.** Maybe your emergency foster home can take your cat on a permanent basis or they themselves have friends or family who would give your cat a forever home.

Ultimately the task of finding a home for your cats will fall on the executor of your will. It would greatly assist your executor if you have stated your wishes about what you want to happen to your cats if you outlive your cats.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO OUR CATS IF WE BECAME INCAPACITATED?

As a result of COVID-19 we could find ourselves too sick at home or in the hospital unable to care for our cats. We could be in the hospital for several weeks while we are recovering from COVID-19. Our hospital stay will be much easier if we know our cats are being cared for while we are away and waiting for us to come home. It is also possible that medical officials will order you not to have any contact with your cats while you are recovering at home. **You will need to discuss how to proceed with your cats living arrangements with your doctor and veterinarian should you test positive or believe you are exposed to COVID-19.**

The reason why it is so important our cats get taken care of is cats cannot go for very long without food. Without food, cats will succumb to liver failure and eventually pass away. For an adult cat the window is only 4 to 5 days and can be as little as 24 hours for a kitten.

EMERGENCY FOSTER PERSON

You will need to designate a person to be the emergency foster for your cats should you be unable to care for them. The person you select should be able to get to your cats' location without a lot of logistical difficulty if you are unable to care for them. Caring for your cats should not be a large burden emotionally, logistically or financially on your designated emergency care person. Your emergency foster care person would look after your pets if you are unable and if needed, foster them until they find a new forever home.

If possible you should arrange to get your emergency foster care person some extra money they can use to put towards the care of your cats. Cash, prepaid credit cards or pet store gift cards would all be things you could use to help cover the costs of caring for your cats.

You need to speak beforehand to your emergency foster person and ask them if they would be comfortable looking after your cats. Starting the conversation could be difficult so one way to start the conversation with your proposed foster person could sound like: "I have a lot of concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and what would happen to my cats if I am unable to do so because I am too sick or in the hospital. Would you be able to care for my cats until I am able to again?"

When you get better and return home you can arrange for your cats to join you.

EMERGENCY FOSTER LOCATION

Some thought needs to be given to where your cats will be cared for. The two options for caring for your cats are your current unoccupied home or moving the cats to the residence of your emergency foster home. If you live in a private residence your emergency foster person should have keys to get in if no one is currently living there. If the residence is rented, the emergency foster person should have keys or a landlord who can let them in.

CARING FOR YOUR CATS IN YOUR UNOCCUPIED RESIDENCE

If your emergency foster person lives close and is able to do so then it might be easier to leave your cats where they are and care for them in your unoccupied residence. If your cats are shy it may be difficult for anyone else except for you to get them in a carrier so they may have to stay where they are. Your emergency foster person can take care of their food, water and litter box.

If your residence is currently occupied by yourself or others who are unable to care for your cats due to being ill from COVID-19 or exposure to COVID-19 it is not safe for anyone to enter your residence. Your cats will need to be placed in a temporary foster home to protect the health of your emergency foster person while you recover. Your cats will need to be placed in carriers by one of the occupants and left outside your residence with all their supplies.

If your cats are being cared for in your unoccupied residence your emergency foster person should wash their hands frequently and avoid touching their face when in your residence and interacting with your cats. The current research for COVID-19 says the virus can not survive in animal fur so your cats are not a danger to the health of your emergency foster. However as a precaution, anyone interacting with your cats must wash their hands and must keep your cats away from their face.

CARING FOR YOUR CATS IN AN EMERGENCY FOSTER HOME

If your emergency foster person lives far away, out of town or requires a lot of public transit to get to your residence it would be best to move your cats to an emergency foster home. **Your emergency foster person can not care for your cats in your residence if others are living there who are positive or have been exposed to COVID-19.**

When your cats get to their temporary home it is important that the cats be confined to a small room such as a bathroom or an unoccupied spare bedroom. **Bedrooms occupied by people or other animals can not be used as sanctuary rooms for cats that have been exposed to COVID-19.** The sanctuary room will minimize the chances of your cat getting sick or getting itself into an unsafe situation. The sanctuary room also helps to minimize stress which can help prevent a stress induced illness. **Under no circumstances should your cat be given full access to the emergency foster residence on the first day.**

Cats and other animals that have been exposed to COVID-19 must be quarantined from other animals for 14 days. Transmission of the COVID-19 virus from animal to animal has not been established or ruled out as of this writing.

For the duration of the stay at the emergency foster home the cats must be confined to the sanctuary room if the house is unoccupied or people in the foster home are asleep. Your emergency foster home may be uncomfortable with cats in their residence so they will need to spend the duration of their stay in the sanctuary room. If this is the case, it is a small price to pay to ensure your cats are fed and safe.

It is going to be a stressful time for your cat without you around so keeping your cats in a small space will give your cat less to adjust to and keep your cat's stress level down. It is always more stressful for humans to place a cat in a sanctuary room then it is for the cat to be in a sanctuary room.

EMERGENCY SANCTUARY ROOM SETUP

The setup of the sanctuary room is simple. There should be a litter box, food and water bowls. There should be nothing that the cat could get into and have an emergency like an unsecured vent cover or small objects it could ingest. In order to minimize stress, it is advised soft music be played in the room such as classical music.

MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR CAT

Does your cat have a special diet that can only be purchased from your veterinarian? If so you should have extra food on hand that can accompany your cat to their emergency foster home. Otherwise leave some money with your emergency foster home that can be used to purchase more food if needed.

As well does your cat have medication? All your medication should be placed in a clearly labelled ziploc bag so that it can be quickly collected. If you are keeping medication for your cat in the fridge, it should be clearly labelled and easy to find in your refrigerator.

EMERGENCY FOOD CONSIDERATIONS

The food your cat is eating now should accompany them to their emergency foster home and they should continue eating it. You should have extra food purchased so your emergency foster home does not run out. However ordering extra food may not be possible, so your foster home would buy the same food (or you could order it online and have it delivered to them).

Emergency foster homes like adopters have to feed cats what they can afford so if it is not financially or logistically possible to get the same food, your cat will have to eat what your emergency foster home can obtain. There is also the possibility your cat could go on a hunger strike in their emergency foster home when they arrive (due to stress) so they may need to get switched to lower quality food to get some food into them. This guide includes instructions for your emergency foster home on how to handle a stressed cat who does not want to eat.

GETTING HELP FOR YOUR EMERGENCY FOSTER PERSON

This guide is a brief introduction to rescuing and caring for cats. Questions not covered in this guide may come up and you may not be available to answer them. You should make arrangements to get your emergency foster extra help should they need it and you can not provide it. Two options to consider:

1. **The rescue where you adopted your cats came from.** As an example, Toronto Cat Rescue's post adoption counselors are available to provide help for your cat. Toronto Cat Rescue will provide advice for any owned cat as well.
2. **Your veterinarian.** You will need to make prior arrangements with your vet clinic for your emergency foster person to ask questions about your cats on your behalf.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CURRENT COVID-19 INFORMATION

COVID-19 Resources for Humans

Canadian Federal Government COVID-19 Information

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

Public Health Ontario COVID-19 Public Resources

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources>

City of Toronto Public Health COVID-19

<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/>

City of Toronto Public Health Hotline

416-338-7600

Telehealth Ontario

1-866-797-0000

COVID-19 Resources for Cats

Veterinary Partner COVID-19 FAQ for Pet Owners

<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=9548687>

Maddie's Fund COVID-19 and Emergency Foster Care Resources

<https://www.maddiesfund.org/covid-19-emergency-foster-care-resources.htm>

ASPCA Debunking COVID-19 Myths About Pets

<https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/debunking-covid-19-myths-about-pets>

Toronto Cat Rescue Resources

Toronto Cat Rescue

<https://torontocatrescue.ca/>

Toronto Cat Rescue Post Adoption Counselling Team

<https://torontocatrescue.ca/programs/post-adoption-support/>

EMERGENCY DECLARATION

I have cats at home that I love and care for. If I have become incapacitated and unable care for them please notify my emergency foster person

EMERGENCY FOSTER PERSON

PHONE NUMBER

E-MAIL



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EMERGENCY FOSTER CARE GUIDE

Complete this guide so your cats can get all the proper care they deserve

A completed copy of this guide should be left in a prominent place in your residence and another copy shared with your emergency foster

This guide is the care instructions for my cats that I love and adore

This care guide was prepared by:

On the date:

Sign Below:



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info@torontocatrescue.ca 416.538.8592

MY INFORMATION AND DESIGNATED FOSTER PERSON

NAME:

STREET ADDRESS:

Apt#:

CITY:

PROVINCE:

POSTAL CODE:

PHONE:

E-MAIL:

If I am unable to care for my cats. I have arranged for and designate the following person to be the emergency foster for my cats.

NAME:

PHONE NUMBER:

E-MAIL:

VETERINARIAN INFORMATION

VETERINARY CLINIC:

VETERINARIAN NAME:

CLINIC ADDRESS:

CLINIC PHONE NUMBER:

CLINIC E-MAIL ADDRESS:

You should contact your veterinarian and inform them of your emergency foster person in the event your emergency foster needs to contact the clinic because your cats need care. You will need to ask your clinic what their procedures are for designating an emergency foster person.

Only complete the following if you have notified your veterinary clinic and completed their procedures for designating an emergency foster person.

I have contacted the (veterinary clinic):

And notified the clinic and completed their procedures for designating my emergency foster person.

Signed:

Date:

INSTRUCTIONS FOR REHOMING MY CATS IN THE EVENT I DIE

Your instructions for rehoming your cats should you die needs to be handwritten, signed and dated. A copy should be included with your estate paperwork.

CAT SUPPLY LOCATIONS IN MY HOME

The following will help your emergency foster quickly find everything

***NEVER ENTER THE HOME IF THE HOME IS OCCUPIED BY PEOPLE
POSITIVE OR EXPOSED TO COVID-19***

Dry Food:

Wet Food:

Cat Treats:

Cat Carriers:

Medications:

Medications in Fridge?: Yes/No

Food Bowls:

Litter Boxes:

Litter Scoops:

Clean Cat Litter:

Cat Toys:

Additional Instructions on Back? Yes/No

Cat Care Instructions 1 of
Complete One Page for Each Cat

Name of Cat:

Age:

Cat Fur Description and Identifying Features:

Health Issues (include food allergies if relevant):

Wet Food Brand:

Dry Food Brand:

Feeding Instructions:

Medication Instructions:

Additional Care Instructions (use back of page if needed):

Cat Care Instructions 2 of
Complete One Page for Each Cat

Name of Cat:

Age:

Cat Fur Description and Identifying Features:

Health Issues (include food allergies if relevant):

Wet Food Brand:

Dry Food Brand:

Feeding Instructions:

Medication Instructions:

Additional Care Instructions (use back of page if needed):

Cat Care Instructions 3 of
Complete One Page for Each Cat

Name of Cat:

Age:

Cat Fur Description and Identifying Features:

Health Issues (include food allergies if relevant):

Wet Food Brand:

Dry Food Brand:

Feeding Instructions:

Medication Instructions:

Additional Care Instructions (use back of page if needed):

Cat Care Instructions 4 of
Complete One Page for Each Cat

Name of Cat:

Age:

Cat Fur Description and Identifying Features:

Health Issues (include food allergies if relevant):

Wet Food Brand:

Dry Food Brand:

Feeding Instructions:

Medication Instructions:

Additional Care Instructions (use back of page if needed):

EMERGENCY PANDEMIC CAT FOSTER CARE GUIDE

The following is a quick guide to setting up an emergency foster home

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

1. Litter Box. A tin foil roasting pan or dish pan from a dollar store can do in an emergency.
2. Cat Litter
3. Litter scoop
4. The Wet and Dry food specified by the owner
5. Food Bowls: One needed for dry food, wet food and water
6. Cat toys. Toy balls can be made with crumpled tin foil and cardboard rolls from toilet paper

LOCATION

Two good choices are a bathroom or **unoccupied** spare bedroom. The room should be easily cat proofed. If you are asleep or away the cats will spend their time here. Giving the cat too much space too soon will cause stress and could lead to illness or a hunger strike (see below).

SETUP

The room will need a litter box with cat litter, cat food and water. Also include some cat toys. Soft music would be a nice touch.

QUARANTINE NOTE REGARDING RESIDENT ANIMALS

The cats must be quarantined from resident animals for 14 days if they have been exposed to COVID-19.

CAT CARE IN A NUTSHELL

1. Feed the cats according the instructions of their owners
2. Replace the water in the water bowls daily
3. Scoop the litter box daily. Wash the litter box once a week.
4. Play with the cat. Love the cat. Wash your hands after interacting with the cat.

MONITORING A CAT'S HEALTH

A healthy cat should eat, drink and use the litter box. They should also be active but when they first arrive in a foster home they may choose to hide.

EMERGENCY FOSTER CARE CAT MEDICAL GUIDE

The following are some of the common issues that can happen when a cat is moved to a foster home.

CAT HUNGER STRIKES (ANOREXIA)

Stressed cats (such as those that have been moved) will sometimes stop eating due to stress. A cat that doesn't eat in a few days will suffer fatal liver failure. The best way to make sure a cat is eating enough is check there is fecal matter in the litter box.

If the cat is not eating here are a few steps to follow:

1. Keep the cat confined to the sanctuary room. Give it the food it has been used to eating. Sometimes after a day, the cat adjusts and will eat on their own.
2. Give the cats lots of love when offering food.
3. Mix the wet food in a little warm water to make the food more fragrant and hold the food under the cat's nose.
4. Other emergency food suggestions are tuna, sardines, kitten food and cat food brands found at the local grocery store.
5. If nothing works or you still have concerns, contact the cat's veterinarian for assistance.

UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS (URI)

Can start as a clear discharge from the eyes and can then progress to sneezing and a runny nose. In severe cases, the cat will become congested and stop eating. URIs quite commonly present in kittens that are moved. If you do notice these symptoms, contact the veterinarian for a treatment plan.

DIARRHEA

A common issue for cats that have been recently moved or had their diet suddenly changed. Usually not a cause for alarm and it will usually resolve in a few days. If the cat however is not thriving or you have concerns, refer the issue to the veterinarian.