

**Pawsitively Clean: Foster Home Sanitation Tips**  
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*Introduction*

This session focuses on best practices for maintaining sanitation in foster homes to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and ensure the safety of both animals and people. Foster care is beneficial for many animals, especially those likely to have a longer length of stay in shelter care (e.g., those on protracted legal holds, those requiring long-term medical care) or particularly those vulnerable to infectious disease (e.g., pregnant animals, puppies and kittens less than five months old) who require physical separation from disease exposure.

Common infectious diseases encountered in foster settings—including parvovirus, panleukopenia, calicivirus, ringworm, and coccidia—must be quickly identified and properly managed. These pathogens are notable for their environmental durability and the challenges they pose, such as pre-symptomatic shedding and zoonotic potential.

*Home Set-Up*

Effective foster home sanitation begins with proper environmental setup. To minimize disease transmission, foster animals should be confined to a small, easily sanitized area, separate from other pets for at least 7–14 days upon arrival, and the space should be furnished minimally. Surfaces should be easy to clean, and pet-proofing measures should be implemented, such as removing unnecessary items and covering electrical cords. Supplies—including gloves, dedicated clothing, cleaning tools (broom, vacuum, mop, rags), soap, stain remover, and spray bottles—should be reserved for foster use, and human traffic in these areas should be kept low. Good ventilation is essential to reduce pathogen persistence. Personal protective equipment should be worn during cleaning, especially when handling sick or quarantined animals.

*Sanitation Practices*

Fomite transmission—where infectious agents are carried on nonliving objects like bedding or cleaning tools—is a key concern, making hand hygiene critical. While alcohol-based hand sanitizers (60–80%) are useful, they are ineffective against nonenveloped viruses such as parvovirus, panleukopenia, and calicivirus. Therefore, gloves should be used when handling infectious animals or concentrated disinfectants, and hands must always be washed after glove removal, especially after contact with bodily fluids or when hands are visibly dirty. Gloves should also always be worn when dealing with ringworm since it is zoonotic.

Effective sanitation always involves a two-step process: cleaning to remove organic matter, followed by disinfection. Cleaning is critical, as organic debris can inactivate many disinfectants and physically block them from reaching pathogens. Disinfectants must be applied at the correct dilution and for the manufacturer-recommended contact time, with thorough rinsing and drying as needed before animals are returned to the area.

### *Disinfectant Selection*

Selecting the right disinfectant is crucial. Bleach is commonly used because it is inexpensive, effective against many pathogens, and readily accessible; however, it must be stored and used precisely to ensure its effectiveness. Because bleach is inactivated by organic matter and detergents, it should only be used on surfaces that have been thoroughly cleaned with a detergent and rinsed. If not applied and used correctly, bleach will not be effective and may offer a false sense of security. If used, bleach should be prepared fresh weekly and stored in opaque containers. Accelerated hydrogen peroxide (AHP), marketed as Oxivir®, offers the advantage of being both a cleaner and disinfectant with rapid kill times and broad efficacy. It remains effective in the presence of organic debris, but a distinct cleaning step (which can be AHP used at a lower concentration) should still be performed prior to using AHP at a disinfectant concentration. AHP is stable for up to 90 days and effective against all nonenveloped viruses (parvovirus, panleukopenia, calicivirus), ringworm, and all of the less hardy pathogens of concern in foster and shelter care. Potassium peroxymonosulfate agents, such as Virkon®, are reliable and effective. Like AHP, they have better cleaning activity and efficacy in the presence of organic matter; however, most products must be mixed fresh every seven days. Quaternary ammonium compounds (quats) are inexpensive and easily accessible, making them suitable for general cleaning, but they are unreliable against panleukopenia/parvovirus and should be avoided if calicivirus is a concern. Quats are effective against ringworm when labeled for *Trichophyton mentagrophytes* and used properly. Examples include F10 and TriGene. Quats must be used at the appropriate concentration, as improper use can cause upper respiratory irritation and ulceration. Natural products like vinegar and baking soda are acceptable for mild cleaning but do not disinfect.

### *Safety*

Safety is paramount in sanitation. Disinfectants that can cause airway irritation and ulceration, such as phenolic disinfectants (e.g., Glen 20), should be avoided due to toxicity, particularly for cats. Disinfectants should always be used at appropriate dilutions; avoid spraying disinfectants directly into cages or living spaces (instead, spray disinfectants onto rags to wipe surfaces or use squeeze bottles that produce a gentle stream). Limit the number of products in use and never mix incompatible chemicals such as AHP and bleach. All disinfectants should be clearly labeled and stored properly.

### *Sanitation Frequency*

Cleaning frequency recommendations for foster areas include deep cleaning and disinfection at least twice weekly, with daily spot cleaning. For ringworm, mechanical removal of hair and debris should be performed daily, with deep sanitation twice weekly. Laundry should be separated, washed thoroughly until free of visible hair, and dried completely. Use maximal agitation (do not overload the laundry drum) and the longest wash cycle. Floors should be vacuumed or cleaned with an electrostatic floor cleaner daily, and carpets should be shampooed or steam cleaned twice; disinfectants may be used in cases of heavy contamination, though some may discolor carpets.

### *Summary*

In summary, effective foster home sanitation relies on environmental control, strong hygiene protocols, appropriate disinfectant selection and use, and adherence to safety measures. The goal

is to minimize disease transmission risk while maintaining a safe, comfortable, and enriched environment for foster animals. Many animals in foster care are in their prime socialization period and must be provided with positive experiences while being shielded from fear-inducing experiences. While co-housing is important for socialization, avoid randomly co-mingling juvenile animals from different litters due to the increased risk of infectious disease.

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