

Orphaned Puppies

Caring for orphaned puppies, especially newborn, is a challenging commitment that should not be taken half-heartedly. It will require a great deal of time and attention to ensure that the pups are receiving proper nutrition and staying healthy. Feedings given every two to three hours during the daytime and possibly a couple of times during the night should be expected until the puppies are at least 3 to 4 weeks old. They will also have to be bathed at least daily to prevent urine and feces scalding.

Raising an orphaned puppy can be a big job, but it is also a very rewarding experience. The strongest bond is made with an animal that is nurtured at such a fragile point in its life. Very young puppies are susceptible to heat loss because of their undeveloped coat and lack of mobility. A warm padded box will make a good artificial nest for the puppies. A rectal temperature of less than 95 degrees is dangerously low for a puppy. The heart rate will slow down, and the digestive tract "turns off". They will need to be warmed slowly over 1 to 2 hours to prevent shock and eventual death. A heating pad or water bottle can be placed beneath half of the box, but be sure that the pups can move away from the heat source if they need to cool down. Too many blankets will make it difficult for them to squirm around and adjust their body temperature.

Since dogs are mammals, they are born unable to eat solid foods and must be nursed by their mothers. Ideally, if a nursing female dog will accept an orphaned puppy, it will receive colostrum not found in milk replacer. Colostrum contains antibodies that will protect the puppy from contagious diseases until it is old enough to receive vaccinations. Never leave the puppy unsupervised with the surrogate mother, however. If she rejects it, she may kill the puppy. Replacement milk formulas are available from veterinarians and pet stores. The artificial milk will be warmed gently to body temperature and delivered by bottle. Never microwave the formula as you may scald the pup. Always test the milk for temperature first. A pinhole should be placed in the end of the rubber nipple so that it will drip slowly when the bottle is squeezed and inverted. When the puppy nurses, the nipple should not collapse like a straw. If it does, widen the hole slightly. Feed the puppies every 2 to 3 hours and once or twice during the night if they are active and crying. The puppies should be rubbed after feeding to burp them. They will also urinate and defecate during this process and should be cleaned with a warm dampened cloth. If a small amount of milk comes out of the nose, the puppy is drinking too fast. If milk continues to come from the nose, the puppy may have a cleft palate. Look for a hole in the roof of the mouth, and have the puppy checked by a veterinarian.

Bathing should be done once daily with non-detergent, non-flea and tick shampoo and warm water. Do not allow the puppies to become chilled.

Puppies should be gaining weight and thriving. If you are in doubt, have them checked by a veterinarian. Puppies often come with intestinal parasites and may need to be de-wormed. At 3 to 4 weeks old, begin offering solid foods. The food must be soaked in formula or water so that it can be mashed into a paste. Or use canned puppy food and smear a little on the puppy's mouth.

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Orphaned puppies are very susceptible to disease. Keep them indoors and away from other dogs to prevent exposure. They should be vaccinated first at 6 weeks old and then adopted out to new owners at 7 to 8 weeks of age.

