



From time to time the AAFP will respond to emerging new knowledge or issues that are of concern to veterinary professionals caring for cats. Our position statements, which represent the view of the association, are available at: www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/position/

AAFP Position Statement

Welfare of shelter cats

This position statement is meant to represent ideal goals in shelter environments. The AAFP recognizes that many shelters will be unable to achieve all of these recommendations due to resource limitations.

Upon intake to a shelter

- ❖ Careful physical exam by sufficiently trained staff.
- ❖ Vaccination according to AAFP shelter guidelines (available at www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/publications/?id=176).
- ❖ Appropriate prophylactic treatment for external and internal parasites.
- ❖ Treatment as needed for illness and injury; as a minimum, palliative care to relieve pain during any holding periods.

Short-term requirements (up to 2-3 weeks)

- ❖ Protection from exposure to infectious disease.
- ❖ Sufficient room to stretch to full body length (body plus front and back legs stretched to full length).
- ❖ Hiding place (separate from litter pan).
- ❖ Soft sleeping surface.
- ❖ Novel and varied toys for cats < 1 year old.
- ❖ Opportunity to eat and drink normally (fresh food and water, separated from elimination space).
- ❖ Freedom from dog view and noise.



Large cage allowing movement, and separate feeding and sleeping areas. Courtesy of Sandra Newbury, UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program

Medium-term requirements (3 weeks to 3 months)

All of the above, plus:

- ❖ Opportunity to interact a minimum of 10 minutes daily with a familiar human (aside from caretaking/cleaning activities), taking into account individual cat preferences.
- ❖ Opportunity to jump, climb and run daily for an appropriate length of time.
- ❖ Choice between warm and cool, hard and soft resting surfaces.
- ❖ Play for all cats – novel and varied toys.
- ❖ Scratching post or other suitable surface/structure.

Long-term requirements (> 3 months)

All of the above, plus:

- ❖ Complete medical and behavioral evaluation every 6 months.
- ❖ Daily exposure to varied, non-threatening physical, auditory and visual stimuli. Paper bags and boxes or things to climb on periodically added and removed, televisions, aquariums, windows, etc.
- ❖ Cat-social cats: daily opportunity to interact with other cats.
- ❖ Non-cat-social cats: should not be forced to interact with other cats (eg, by housing in group areas with limited space to retreat).
- ❖ Outdoor access that is environmentally safe and secure.

Capacity and intake

- ❖ Shelters should establish an upper capacity limit beyond which they are unable to provide humane care for cats. A written policy should be established and followed regarding what to do when the number of cats in need of shelter exceeds this limit. This policy needs to address either limiting intake, immediately releasing some cats (temporarily to foster care or permanently) or humanely euthanizing cats as described below. Routinely admitting more cats than can be humanely cared for, allowing cats to die of disease associated with overcrowding, or allowing cats to suffer long term in conditions that fail to meet minimal welfare standards are not acceptable.



Euthanasia

- ❖ Euthanasia should be performed using an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)-approved method by a veterinarian or sufficiently trained technician and in accordance with all locally applicable laws.

Enriched environment providing opportunities for jump and play. Courtesy of Kate Hurley

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