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Mild winter brings feral kitten season early

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TILLAMOOK - The clement weather this winter has brought kitten season early to the coast, but nights can still be cold and put orphaned kittens at risk of a cruel death. Christine Watt of United Paws of Tillamook offers these tips to give orphaned kittens a fighting chance until you can get them to a veterinarian.

First, are you sure the kittens are orphans? If they're plump, clean and sleeping contentedly, probably their mother isn't far away. If the kittens are dirty and meowing, chances are she has been killed, and these kittens need help immediately.

The most important thing to do is keep them warm. A nice padded box for a nest can be warmed up with a heating pad set on low or a hot water bottle, either traditional or home-made from a plastic drink bottle. Be sure to cover the heat source with a towel and leave room for the kittens to crawl away if they get too warm.

After the kittens are warmed up, they can digest food. If you can get kitten formula it is best, or use human baby formula at twice the usual strength, at room temperature. Even 5 percent sugar water will do, in a pinch. Do not use cow's milk. Feed very small amounts from a small dropper, with the kitten held on its stomach, as holding it on its back can cause choking. A kitten can be burped over your shoulder by tapping its back very gently.

To clean kittens it is best not to get them wet, but to use a warm, damp cloth. Place a towel over the box of kittens to keep them cozy, and change bedding frequently. Check on your orphans periodically until you can get them to a veterinarian.

For more detailed instructions, log on to www.unitedpaws.org and click the Resources tab, then scroll down to the Helpful Documents section where you will find a Kitten Rescue document. It even has a goat's milk recipe for kitten formula.

And don't forget - the regular monthly United Paws Adopt-a-thon will be held from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, April 24, at the Tillamook County Fairgrounds. There is an adoption fee, but it includes a neuter or spay, or if the kitten is too young, a certificate for neuter/spay. Felines have their inoculations, too. And as always, adopters will be screened to protect the animals. And there will be dogs, too, if weather permits.

United Paws Adoption Fair

Noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, April 24

4-H Dorm, Tillamook County Fairgrounds, 4603 Third St., Tillamook

www.unitedpaws.org