

Why is the Best Place for Tiny Kittens with Their Mother?

- The best food for unweaned kittens is their mother's milk. Kitten formula is lifesaving, but it doesn't contain antibodies that newborn kittens desperately need to fight disease. It can also cause diarrhea or constipation in many kittens.
- Kittens need to suckle. Almost 40% of orphaned unweaned kittens suckle on other kittens, often on the genitals. This can lead to serious medical problems and often requires separation of kittens from their siblings, who are now their only source of comfort.
- The best company for unweaned kittens is their mother and siblings. They learn normal behaviours from their family. Kittens that are removed from their mother very young often have abnormal behaviours that can be permanent problems for the kittens and their adopters.
- Shelters are dangerous places for kittens. Despite everything we do to prevent illness, kittens remain the most vulnerable population in the shelter and are prone to diseases like upper respiratory infection, pneumonia and diarrhea. Sometimes these diseases are fatal. The younger they are, the more vulnerable they are.
- Even foster homes can be dangerous. If caregivers foster many kittens, resistant bugs can remain in the home and cause serious illness. These resistant infections include panleukopenia, calicivirus, Giardia and coccidiosis.
- How about the mom? There are multiple consequences to removing kittens from a nursing mom. Mother cats are famously devoted to their kittens. Removing young kittens is emotionally distressing for mother cats.
- Sudden removal of kittens can cause mastitis (teat infection). Mastitis is painful at best and can cause serious illness and even death in severe cases.
- Cats cycle again very quickly after kittens are removed. That means... more kittens! If a cat can't be trapped and spayed, taking her kittens away just leads to more litters. Population control is the cornerstone of reducing shelter intake and euthanasia. Multiple litters in a season also drain the cat's physical reserves and make her weaker and more susceptible to infection.

