

# Do you have any veterinary guidelines on spaying pregnant cats?

Whether to spay pregnant animals is yet another in a long list of difficult questions shelter workers face. In response to a question on this topic, Dr. Aziz provides some insight and resources to address the issue.

## Question:

We are an open admission shelter and periodically find ourselves with cats that have been surrendered or have come in as strays that turn out to be pregnant. Our policy is to spay/neuter all animals before they leave the shelter, but some of our staff have objected to spaying of pregnant cats. I am looking for any veterinary guidelines you may have on this issue. Thank you.

## Response:

If your staff has ethical concerns regarding the spaying pregnant cats and right to life for kittens, I am not aware of guidelines that explicitly address these concerns; however, I can provide you with resources to support the practice of pregnant spays as being humane for the fetuses that are terminated.

Sara White, DVM wrote an article in 2012 regarding the prevention of fetal suffering during pregnant spays. The article relays scientific understandings regarding fetal unconsciousness during spay and proper fetal disposition after spay. It clarifies the concept that mammalian fetuses are unconscious throughout pregnancy and birth and therefore cannot suffer while dying in utero.

[The American Veterinary Medical Association's 2013 Guidelines for Euthanasia of Animals](#) refers to scientific information regarding the unconsciousness of fetuses, as well. Our [Association of Shelter Vet Guidelines for spay/neuter programs](#) relays that, in general, spaying pregnant animals can be performed safely in regards to anesthetic and surgical complications.

In general, it is important to stress that every shelter has a limited capacity to care for neonates and that neonates often fare poorly in a shelter

setting. Neonatal care is resource-intensive and requires a strong foster program, proactive and efficient population management, and additional financial resources. And, of course, spaying and neutering helps fight the battle of overpopulation of unwanted animals as well as improving health and reducing disease spread for community cats.

Chumkee Aziz, DVM  
Resident, Koret Shelter Medicine  
Program  
Center for Companion Animal Health  
UC Davis School of Veterinary  
Medicine

[www.sheltermedicine.com](http://www.sheltermedicine.com)

[www.facebook.com/sheltermedicine](https://www.facebook.com/sheltermedicine)



[Koret Shelter Medicine Program](#)

