

# Instructions for daily monitoring of animal health and behavior

An ounce of prevention... Daily monitoring of shelter animals before morning cleaning and feeding helps you spot behavior problems before they are irreversible and health problems before they turn into disease outbreaks. Here are tips on how to implement daily monitoring, with links to sample logs to record findings.

Monitoring each animal in the shelter is an important support to the [daily rounds process](#) and dramatically improves the likelihood that signs of problems will be identified early. For example, inappetance, vomiting, or diarrhea could possibly all be missed if no note is taken prior to morning cleaning.

## Daily monitoring

Care staff who work with the animals early in the morning may be best able to pick up on signs of problems before cages are cleaned and food is replaced. Appetite and food intake monitoring is best done during feeding. Monitoring sheets, filled out by direct care givers, can then be consulted by those doing rounds even if signs of possible illness have been cleaned away.

Provide caretakers with guidance on what to do if an animal with possible signs of infectious illness is identified prior to cleaning (e.g. clean that animal last after caring for healthy animals in the area, make a note on the veterinarian's log, move the animal to an isolation area if appropriate).

To implement monitoring by care staff:

- Provide training for care staff in recognition of clinical signs of disease and behavior concerns.
  - For an example training manual, please refer to our [Daily Animal Health Monitoring Program--Training Manual/How to Guide](#)
- Utilize daily monitoring forms for each animal in the shelter and provide training for care staff in utilizing these forms for recording all daily observations
  - For an example, refer to our [Daily Animal Health Monitoring Program – Quick and Easy Guide](#)
- Look for urine/fecal output before beginning cleaning and any signs of vomit

- Record attitude prior to feeding in the morning
- Monitor appetite during feeding
- In general housing areas, if an animal appears sick, mark the cage so others are alerted
  - Unless an animal requires immediate intervention, cleaning staff should not enter the cage of an ill animal until feeding and cleaning of the general population has been completed
  - Follow appropriate procedures to notify veterinary staff or supervisors of problems or concerns
- Include weekly weight checks as part of a complete monitoring program (have weighing as part of the intake process as well)
- When animals remain in the shelter for longer than one month, perform a full physical exam including weight and body condition score by trained staff on a monthly basis
  - Make sure veterinary examinations are performed at least biannually for all animals, more frequently if problems are identified
- Geriatric or health-compromised animals should be evaluated by a veterinarian as needed for appropriate case management

Although implementation of daily monitoring before cleaning and during feeding can seem daunting at a busy shelter, this has been accomplished even at shelters with very modest resources. For instance, Orange County Animal Services (Orlando, Florida) tracked the time of day when they had the fewest visitors to their dog kennels, and closed the kennels to the public during that time for "Doggy Wellness Hour". This allowed staff to concentrate fully on monitoring dogs during feeding time while the public was encouraged to visit with the cats.

*Ultimately careful daily monitoring will save time, as problems get recognized early before they expand to cause much more time consuming nightmares and allow health and welfare issues to be addressed quickly.*

## Recording your findings

A form for recording observations will help staff remember to consider each parameter as well as let other people know what was found. This could be as simple as a card with check boxes and a notes section for anything abnormal. The record can be kept on paper or as an electronic form. Example of paper monitoring sheets can be found at the bottom of this page.

Some shelters have developed forms in mobile electronic spreadsheets or databases that can be taken through the shelter as observations are

made. Others use simple sheets kept in a binder. Paper forms should be stored in a location that makes them easy to access by all staff as needed (e.g. by RVT or veterinarian responding to reported problems).

We have found these tips to be helpful:

- Keep monitoring sheets in a separate binder so animals cannot reach and demolish them.
  - If monitoring sheets are cage side, have them secured in a waterproof holder as far away from the animal as possible
- Keep a separate binder for each ward or room.
- Make sure cages and animals are both properly identified so that it is easy to connect the monitoring sheet to the correct animal.
- Move monitoring sheets to new location if animal is moved.

Provide staff with lists of [red flags of emergency medical, of potentially infectious disease concerns](#) and of [behavioral concern](#). If any of these described issues are found, have a protocol in place for how to respond since immediate action is required.

## **Special considerations for monitoring group housing**

Group housing of animals creates particular challenges for monitoring. Ideally, only healthy, compatible animals should be co-housed, and even so, time needs to be taken to evaluate the health and welfare of each animal, each day. Even littermates need daily individual attention and assessment, particularly during feeding time. Failure to eat can be an early sign of illness or may occur because more dominant animals in the group prevent others from eating. This is not always obvious: subtle body language can be clearly read by another animal even without a lot of growling and drama evident on casual observation. Monitoring guidelines in group housing include:

- Make sure that every animal is observed eating on a daily basis. Separate any animal that does not eat from the group, try offering different food, and perform a full physical exam if inappetence persists.
- If diarrhea, abnormal urine, vomit, mucous (e.g. on the side of a cage) is observed, perform a careful physical exam on each animal to determine which one(s) are affected.
- If any member of a litter is observed to have symptoms of a possibly contagious illness, isolation precautions should be taken for the entire litter.
- Perform a full physical exam, including weight and body condition

score, on at least a monthly basis for animals group housed long term.

- Do not group house animals with medical conditions requiring close monitoring.

To learn more about group housing see the ASPCApro's [Daily Monitoring in Communal Cat Rooms](#) and [Outfitting and Enriching Communal Cat Rooms](#).

## **Examples of daily monitoring sheets:**

[Feline Daily Observation & Treatment Chart](#)

[Daily Medical and Behavioral Monitoring Form for Cats](#)

[Canine Daily Observation & Treatment Chart](#)

[Daily Medical & Behavioral Monitoring Form for Dogs](#)

[Daily Monitoring Sheet with Behavior check](#)

[Sample Full Size Sheet new Animals](#)