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Handling and Husbandry of Neonatal Nondomestic Cats

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has determined that newborn and infant nondomestic cats four weeks (28 days) of age or younger (neonate or neonatal) have special handling and husbandry needs. Among other things, the Animal Welfare Act regulations require licensees to provide these animals with preventive and responsive veterinary care and adequate housing and nutrition, and to ensure that they are handled safely and protected from harm.

Licensees who do not house neonatal nondomestic cats in a controlled, sanitary, temperature-controlled environment and do not handle such animals in a manner that does not expose them to any form of public contact, including public feeding and handling, are considered noncompliant with the veterinary care and handling requirements of the Animal Welfare Act regulations. See 9 C.F.R. §§ 2.40(a), 2.40(b)(1), 2.40(b)(2), 2.40(b)(4), 2.131(b)(1), 2.131(c)(1), 2.131(c)(3), 2.131(d)(1), 2.131(e).⁸

Neonatal nondomestic cats of this age range are not able to thermoregulate^{1, 2, 3, 7} and lack a fully functioning immune system to fight off disease and infection.^{2, 4, 5, 7} Neonates will obtain most immunity from their mother, primarily through suckling antibody-rich colostrum (first milk),^{1, 2, 5, 6, 7} and should be housed with their mother for as long as possible after birth to promote good health. Because of their limited immunity, their health is at risk if they are exposed to other animals or offered for public contact. Until these animals can thermoregulate and are immunocompetent, they should be housed in the controlled environment of a heated, clean, and sheltered enclosure (such as a nursery), or in a clean, sheltered enclosure with the mother and any healthy siblings.

Dealers, exhibitors, and registrants who do not handle and care for neonatal nondomestic cats in a manner that is consistent with the guidance in this Tech Note are considered noncompliant with the veterinary care and handling requirements of the Animal Welfare Act regulations. See 9 C.F.R. §§ 2.40(a), 2.40(b)(1), 2.40(b)(2), 2.40(b)(4), 2.131(b)(1), 2.131(c)(1), 2.131(c)(3), 2.131(d)(1), 2.131(e).

References:

- 1) Najera, F., Revuelta, L., and Kaufman, K.J., 2011, "Veterinary Aspects of Hand-rearing Two Orphaned African Lion (*Panthera leo*) Cubs: A Revision of Procedures", *Journal of Wildlife Rehabilitation*, Vol. 31(1), pp 7-14: <https://theiwrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/JWR311F.pdf>
- 2) *Merck Veterinary Manual*, 2012, "Management of the Neonate in Small Animals": http://www.merckmanuals.com/vet/management_and_nutrition/management_of_the_neonate/management_of_the_neonate_in_small_animals.html
- 3) Strick, J., 2006, "Hand Rearing of Exotic Felid Species Part 1," *Wildlife Middle East*, Vol. 1(3): http://www.wmenews.com/newsletters/wme_dec_2006_en-4.pdf
- 4) AZA Lion Species Survival Plan (2012), *Lion Care Manual*, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Silver Spring, MD, 143 pp 86-87: http://www.aza.org/uploadedFiles/Animal_Care_and_Management/Animal_Programs/Animal_Programs_Database/Animal_Care_Manuals/Lion%20Care%20Manual%202012.pdf
- 5) Pedersen, N.C., 1991, "Common Infectious Diseases of Multiple Cat Environments," in *Feline Husbandry: Diseases and Management in the Multiple Cat Environment*, Chapter 4, Regents of

the University of California, Davis, CA: <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ccah/local-assets/pdfs/FelHusCh4.pdf>

- 6) AVMA, *Feline Panleukopenia* client brochure:
https://ebusiness.avma.org/files/productdownloads/LR_Feline%20Panleukopenia_012916.pdf
- 7) Hedberg, G. 2002, "Exotic Felids" In: Gage, LJ (ed.) *Hand Rearing Wild and Domestic Mammals*, Iowa State University Press.
- 8) The referenced regulatory text reads:
 - 9 C.F.R. § 2.40(a): Each dealer or exhibitor shall have an attending veterinarian who shall provide adequate veterinary care to its animals in compliance with this section.
 - 9 C.F.R. § 2.40(b), (b)(1), (b)(2), and (b)(4): Each dealer or exhibitor shall establish and maintain programs of adequate veterinary care that include: (1) The availability of appropriate facilities, personnel, equipment, and services to comply with the provisions of this subchapter; (2) The use of appropriate methods to prevent, control, diagnose, and treat diseases and injuries, ... (4) Adequate guidance to personnel involved in the care and use of animals regarding handling,....
 - 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(b)(1): Handling of all animals shall be done as expeditiously and carefully as possible in a manner that does not cause trauma, overheating, excessive cooling, behavioral stress, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort.
 - 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(c)(1): During public exhibition, any animal must be handled so there is minimal risk of harm to the animal and to the public, with sufficient distance and/or barriers between the animal and the general viewing public so as to assure the safety of animals and the public.
 - 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(c)(3): Young or immature animals shall not be exposed to rough or excessive public handling or exhibited for periods of time which would be detrimental to their health or well-being.
 - 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(d)(1): Animals shall be exhibited only for periods of time and under conditions consistent with their good health and well-being.
 - 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(e): When climatic conditions present a threat to an animal's health or well-being, appropriate measures must be taken to alleviate the impact of those conditions. An animal may never be subjected to any combination of temperature, humidity, and time that is detrimental to the animal's health or well-being, taking into consideration such factors as the animal's age, species, breed, overall health status, and acclimation.

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