

How to reduce unwanted litters and end shelter deaths for kittens nationwide



The spring season brings warmer weather, longer days, colorful blooms and many baby animals. In the wild, newborn babies can flourish freely, but for many animal shelters, the spring is the busiest time of year because donations of unwanted kittens and cats often outpace available space.

As is known in the industry as the annual kitten tsunami, each spring and early summer brings an overwhelming number of kittens from unwanted and oftentimes unintended litters to animal shelters. Reducing the number of unwanted spring litters means taking action now to sterilize cats before they become pregnant.

“Caring pet providers who do not want to allow the nearly inevitable, unplanned and unwanted pregnancy to occur must request the fail-safe spay before the predictable breeding season arrives,” says veterinarian W. Marvin Mackie, D.V.M., retired. “That means all moms of this past year and young females by 5 months of age should have their one-time sterilization surgery now.”

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Why is it important to have females spayed by five months rather than six months or later? Mackie explains that while mating can occur all year long, peak mating times correlate with the equinox. Lengthening daylight rules the process!

“When the days start to get longer in January and February, additional sunlight signals a female cat’s pituitary gland to start ovarian activity and she will go into heat,” says Mackie. “Whenever a queen mates, pregnancy is guaranteed, and 61 to 63 days later an average of three to five kittens are born. Then, two months later the kittens are weaning and the caretaker may decide to keep them or try to re-home them. If unsuccessful, many are taken to shelters. Shelters call May, June and July the kitten tsunami season as there are multiple litters arriving each day. The shelter becomes overwhelmed, as there are not enough homes available.”

What can you do to prevent unwanted litters and help your cat and cats in general? Here are three tips from the experts at animal advocacy group [Marian’s Dream](#):

Get your cat fixed now

If you have a cat who needs to be spayed or neutered, don’t delay. Waiting until six months or later can mean they are already in their cycle and can become pregnant. More than a million cats are euthanized each year at shelters because there are simply more cats than available space. Many of these deaths would be eliminated by sterilization before puberty.

Learn more

The benefits of early spaying go beyond reducing shelter populations. An estimated 75,000 cats every year die of mammary gland cancer and research shows cats spayed before their first heat cycle have a 91 percent lower risk of developing it. Learn more at <http://www.mariansdream.org>.

Spread the word

Strike up a conversation with your friends and colleagues, especially those who have kittens so they too can know about appropriate times to spay and neuter. Additionally, ask your veterinarian what he or she is recommending and have a discussion about why it's best to "Fix by Five" months.

"The sheer number of veterinarians who now sterilize cats younger than six months report that ease of surgery, safety and rapid recovery, combine to make spaying at four or five months a sound practice," says Mackie. "By performing surgery by five months and eliminating all of the 'oops' litters, overbirthing could theoretically be eliminated in one or two years. What a triumph that would be for all concerned."