

Wilmette Pet Center

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I've found a baby rabbit, what do I do?

In Illinois, you need to be a licensed wildlife rehabilitator to care for wild orphaned animals, but many are overwhelmed at this time of year with rescues and can be difficult to get in contact with. If you need to care for truly orphaned baby rabbits while you get them to a vet or wildlife rehabilitator, read this article for help.

It often appears that the mother has abandoned her babies, but that is not usually the case. Mother rabbits will ignore their nest and babies all day, only going back to the nest to feed her kits twice a night - by doing so helps prevent predators from finding the babies. Her milk is high in fat and protein, to help her babies get through the day.

If you have found a nest of abandoned babies, check their temperature: if they are warm or their stomach is full of milk, mom has not abandoned them, so it's best to leave them alone.

**Note: It is OKAY that you have touched these rabbits with your bare hands. Mom does NOT care. We don't abandon our kids when they smell funny, and neither do Momma Rabbits!*

If their eyes are open, are about 5 - 7", and they are about the size of a softball, they are old enough to care for themselves, and it is best to leave them alone. If the nest has been disturbed, just rebuild it as best you can. Try to keep pets away from that area until the babies have weaned (about a month). You can lay some string or grass across the top of a nest and return the next day to be sure momma is returning. If their eyes are still closed or they are cold, it is time to take action until you can get them to a rehabilitator.



These baby rabbits are old enough to be on their own.

What you need:

Kitten Milk Replacement powder or liquid

Probiotics (like BeneBac)

Syringe/medicine dropper/bottle

Heating pad - Reptile heaters are perfect.

Pedialyte (if the baby is dehydrated)

Provide a warm nesting area in either a bucket or Kritter Keeper. Use clean towels to make a soft nest, and place the heating pad underneath half the nest (so they can get away from the heat if needed.) Mix KMR powder as directed or use canned and add a little goat milk or heavy cream to increase the fat and protein content. Add a pinch of probiotics, to help ensure they have healthy gut flora. Refrigerate the unused portion, gently warming what you need each time - don't feed it cold.

How to feed:

Check to see if the baby is dehydrated: pinch the skin between your fingers and release; if it snaps back, they're fine. If it stays peaked up, they're dehydrated and need frequent small amounts of unflavored Pedialyte.

Baby rabbits feed from their mothers while lying on their backs. You may loosely wrap baby in a soft face cloth or hand towel and lay it on your lap or in the crook of your arm. If bunny will NOT eat this way, you can try feeding them slightly upright. Feed them slowly, watching them lick and swallow so they do not aspirate. *It is ABSOLUTELY CRUCIAL to let the baby eat at its own pace—especially if it is not suckling from the syringe willingly. If you squirt the liquid in too quickly you can aspirate (get liquid in) the lungs and the rabbit can suffocate.* Feed twice a day, until their bellies are taught and full.

How much to feed:

- **Newborn to One Week (20 grams, no to little hair) :** 2 - 2 1/2 cc/ml each feeding
- **1-2 weeks (40 grams, 4" long):** 5-7 cc/ml each feeding
- **2-3 weeks (60 grams, 4 - 4.5" inches, hair standing up):** 7-13 cc/ml each feeding
- **3-6 weeks (80 grams 5 - 7"):** 13-15 cc/ml each feeding (may be LESS depending on size of rabbit!)

After each feeding, it is important to make the bunny defecate and urinate (until their eyes are open) to keep the intestinal tract and urinary system running smoothly. Use a cotton ball moistened with warm water and gently stroke the anal area until the bunny starts producing stool and urine and keep stroking until the bunny stops. You are reproducing the behavior of the mother rabbit who would lick her young to stimulate them to go to the bathroom and to keep the nest clean.

Baby rabbit's eyes open at about 14 days of age. Start introducing them to timothy and oat hay, pellets and water (always add fresh greens for wild ones--dandelion greens, parsley, carrot tops, , all freshly washed). Continue to offer hand feeding in addition to their fresh foods (just offer less).

Wild rabbits must be released, as they will never become domesticated. Release them away from homes, streets, and other animals when they are 4 weeks old - and about 5" long - into the wild where they truly belong.

Links: [Willowbrook Wildlife Center](#) 630-942-6200

[Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation](#) at 847-602-0628 or 847-842-8000

[Wildlife Hotline](#) 855-WILD-HELP (855-945-3435)