SPOT CLEANING
Mike Greenberg, DVM
Cornell Shelter Medicine Intern 2010-2011

The following protocol is a template. It may not apply specifically to your particular shelter. That being said, the principles within it can be extrapolated and applied to any shelter where cats are being housed individually, especially within an “isolation room” or “infirmary”. Of course, cleaning is just one component of an infectious disease management program. Careful attention must also be paid to other issues such as vaccination, stress reduction, and appropriate treatment of infectious disease.

SPOT CLEANING PROTOCOLS
Upper respiratory tract disease (URTD, URI) is arguably the most common contagious condition that we deal with in shelter cats. This cleaning protocol will address both the infectious agents as well as issues of stress that lead to feline URTD. It is important to remember that although the URI “bugs” are important to consider, it is equally important to consider stress, as stress is a known trigger for occurrence and recurrence of feline URTD.

Principles
1. Moving cats out of cages to clean daily actually increases the incidence of disease. This seemingly small amount of stress has been shown to cause/reactivate upper respiratory infections in shelter cats.

2. The cat’s bedding need not be completely replaced on a daily basis unless it is heavily soiled. Keeping unsoiled bedding in a cage provides a familiar scent for the cat, further helping to reduce stress. If your shelter uses newspaper bedding, there is no need to bed the entire cage. Instead, the floor can be left bare and the cat should be provided with a soft towel or blanket as well as a “den”.

3. Moving cats causes contamination by hands, clothing, incompletely clean carriers, and close proximity to other cats in carriers. It’s important to remember that cats with URTD can be infected with multiple viral and bacterial agents, and that cats in the infirmary can easily infect each other with additional bugs.

4. Moving cats also increases cleaning time significantly, needlessly increasing work and stress for the shelter staff.
STANDARD SPOT CLEANING PROTOCOL

1. Prepare a cart with: litter and new litter boxes (in case some are needed), fresh towels, cleaning cloth or towel for each cat, a box of gloves, 1% Trifectant to spray on rag (do NOT spray around cat). Also prepare a container in which to place soiled bedding and dirty rags.

2. Put on fresh gloves, which you will change between each cat. Put on washable apron.

3. Each cat should have a cat den in its cage ALL OF THE TIME. This can be as simple as a cardboard box or paper bag. However, the ideal den would be a plastic carrier with a door that can be shut during cleaning. The cat is placed in its den during cage cleaning. (If a cage is too small for a den, it is likely too small for cats in the long run.) If cages are “double sided” (e.g. adjoining 2x2 cages with a passage way between them), the cat can be placed in one side of the cage while the other side is spot-cleaned.

4. Spray Trifectant on a clean rag FOR THIS CAGE ONLY. Set aside for a moment.

5. Open cage and encourage cat to go in carrier or den in cage, or clean gently around the cat. **Change out bedding only if soiled.**

6. Brush/ remove spilled litter/ food with gloved hand and add to litter box. Scoop out feces from litter box as well as urine-soaked letter. Add additional litter as needed.

7. Use trifectant rag to wipe soiled cage walls. In cages that house cats with upper respiratory tract disease, wipe all sneeze marks off walls to enable monitoring.

8. Bedding (newspaper) is replaced but does not cover entire floor of cage. Newspaper is only placed beneath cardboard litter boxes or other items that tend to become heavily soiled. Some cages may not require any newspaper. Be sure that **ALL CATS HAVE A TOWEL OR BLANKET** to provided a soft, warmer area to sleep. Of course, this should be replaced if heavily soiled.

9. Replace litter box, food, and/or water bowls only if heavily soiled. Otherwise, old food and water can simply be dumped and replaced.

10. Let cat out of box or den.

11. Remove gloves, close cage. Wash hands and arms with soap and water and dry. Wipe front of apron with trifectant sprayed towel or rag.

12. Move onto next cat.
MODIFIED SPOT CLEANING PROTOCOL

If cages are too small to fit a plastic carrier with a door and/or the cat simply will not stay in its den during cleaning, you will have to remove the cat during spot cleaning. The modified spot cleaning protocol addresses this.

1. For this protocol, all steps are the same with the exception of placing the cat into its den. Instead, a clean carrier is brought into the room for each cat (or group of cats/kittens in one cage). The cat is placed into this carrier.

2. All other steps regarding cage cleaning and maintenance of unsoiled bedding are followed as in the “Standard Spot Cleaning Protocol”

3. The cat is placed back into its cage. Organic matter is then cleaned out of the carrier. The carrier is then sprayed with dilute (1:32) bleach solution and allowed to stand for 10 minutes. Any residue can then be wiped with a damp cloth.

DEEP CLEANING PROTOCOL

1. This protocol shall be used ONLY AFTER A CAT HAS BEEN MOVED OUT OF A CAGE, prior to another cat being placed in the same cage.

2. Put on a pair of disposable gloves and a washable apron.

3. Remove all bedding, the litter box, and food/water dishes.

4. Use a spray bottle to apply 1% Trifectant to all walls and door of cage. Wipe down with single-use cloth or paper towel to remove all organic material. If the cage has caked on debris allow Trifectant to sit for a few minutes and wipe again.

5. Use a spray bottle to cover all walls and both sides of door with dilute (1:32) bleach. Allow bleach to stand for at least 10 minutes.

6. Wipe off bleach residue with damp cloth, then dry with a dry cloth.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

1. **Q:** What if the cage houses an aggressive/rambunctious cat, or if there are multiple kittens who continuously attempt to escape?  
   **A:** If any of the above occur, a modified spot cleaning protocol can be used.

2. **Q:** When do we need to “deep clean” or “completely clean” a cage in the infirmary?  
   **A:** When a cat moves out of the infirmary, its cage must be deep cleaned prior to placing another cat in the cage. To do this, follow the “Deep Cleaning” protocol.

3. **Q:** What do you mean by “heavily soiled” bedding? How do I know when I need to replace bedding?  
   **A:** If the bedding has a large amount of soft feces (diarrhea) that appears to have soaked through, then that piece of bedding should be replaced. Similarly, if a cat has spilled its water and soaked the underlying bedding, that should be replaced. As a rule, unless the bedding is soaked through or very “caked” with mucous or fecal material, it does not need to be replaced.