



**Welcome to the
Humane Society of Greater Miami's
Foster Care Program**

PUPPY CARE

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Humane Society of Greater Miami's (HSGM) Foster Care Program is to increase the number of adoptable dogs and cats at the shelter and improve the quality of adoptions by making sure that animals sent home are healthy and of the proper age, giving them the best possible chance to remain in their future home as a well-adjusted pet.

Why is foster care needed?

Pet overpopulation is a serious problem animal shelters face across the United States. It is estimated that 6 to 8 million dogs and cats are relinquished to shelters in the U.S. each year (from HSUS statistics). In Miami-Dade County, at least 30,000 dogs and cats are relinquished to area shelters annually. Shelters struggle to care for as many homeless animals as they can, but there are simply too many of them! Often, shelters are forced to euthanize animals because they don't have enough space for all of them. Most shelters are filled with healthy, socialized animals that are ready and able to be adopted. As soon as one of these animals finds a home, another healthy, socialized animal is ready to take its place. Because there are so many healthy animals that are ready to find homes immediately, there is no space in most shelters for sick, injured, or underage animals.

These helpless sick, injured, and underaged animals require round-the-clock care, special food requirements, and weeks (sometimes months) of rehabilitation. Shelters are often not able to provide the necessary time, cage space, money, and attention necessary for development and/or recovery of these special-needs animals. Many shelters are forced to euthanize such animals, because caring for them in a shelter often prevents the adoption of healthy animals. For example, an orphaned three-week-old puppy would require at least four weeks of hands-on care. If that puppy were kept in a cage at a shelter for four weeks, that would prevent the adoption of about 8-10 healthy, socialized puppies that could have been in that cage and found homes, one after the other. That's where fostering comes in.

What is a Foster Parent's job?

A foster parent assumes the responsibility of caring for an orphaned animal until it is physically and socially ready to be adopted into a permanent home. The foster parent provides the time, space, physical care, financial support, and social attention necessary for development of these special-needs animals.

Becoming a foster parent can be a wonderfully fulfilling experience. To know that you have contributed to saving the life of an animal that otherwise may not have had a chance is a rewarding feeling that you will enjoy.

Raising Orphaned Puppies

Modified from
Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program *Guide to Raising Orphaned Puppies*
Center for Companion Animal Health, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, et. al

BEFORE THEY ARRIVE: SUPPLIES YOU WILL NEED

Remember, foster parents are needed because they can provide the space, attention, food, grooming and financial support necessary to raise the animal. Therefore, foster parents are responsible for acquiring all of the supplies needed to care for their foster pet. The Humane Society of Greater Miami offers a variety of pet care supplies for sale, and foster parents are entitled to 50% off of items needed to care for your foster animal. From time to time, pet supplies are donated to the Society that we may be able to pass along to foster parents to help with the cost of fostering. However, foster parents should anticipate the need to purchase all of the necessary supplies.

Box, carrier or crate

You may want to use the carrier in which you took the litter home. It will provide a familiar-smelling, dark, quiet home for your foster pups. However, a bigger box may be desirable, as it will allow you to see in, as well as provide plenty of room for the growing litter of puppies.

Newspapers

Keep several layers in the bottom of the box, and they will come in handy when the puppies start to roam around the room. Also, newspapers should be shredded and used as bedding material in the box overnight.

Water bowls

They should be heavy and impossible to tip. They should be made of stainless steel, porcelain or ceramic. Do not use plastic bowls as plastic is porous and difficult to disinfect.

Food bowls

You can use store-bought bowls or paper plates; any relatively flat plate or saucer will do. The larger the litter, the larger the plate should be so that no one gets crowded out, or you might want to use several plates.

Food

Depending on the age of the puppies you may need: a puppy milk replacement (such as Esbilac or Puppy Lac), high-quality dry puppy food, and high-quality canned puppy food such as A/D canned food, Science Diet Puppy Food or P/D canned food.

Heating pads or lamps

Puppies cannot regulate their own body temperature, so you will need a heat source, such as a heating pad or lamp. The heating pad set on "low" should be placed below the box, but only under the nesting area where the puppies sleep. This will allow the puppies to move away from the warmth if they get too hot. Heating pads can become

dangerously hot and should never be placed in direct contact with the puppies. The nest box temperature should be approximately 88° to 92°F for puppies up to one week of age, approximately 85°F for the second week, and approximately 80°F (26.5°C) for the 3rd and 4th weeks of age. Over the age of one month, the room temperature should be between 70° and 75°F.

Pedialyte

It is used as drinking water, especially for dehydrated pups (a vet will tell you when and how to use it).

Toys

Durable, disinfectable toys are good to reuse for new litters. Clean tennis balls, old stuffed socks also work well. Be sure to “puppy-proof” your home. Anything irreplaceable should be kept out of reach.

Living Quarters

Your foster puppy will need its own crate to sleep in. You must pet-proof any part of your home where the animal will go. Remove all cleaners, insecticides, chemicals, **medicines** and any other poisonous products. Remove all fragile or breakable items, small knick-knacks, and valuable items. Tape electrical cords out of the animal’s reach.

PROTECTING YOUR RESIDENT PETS

Although the foster animals are given a health check before being placed into a foster home, many viruses have an incubation of 7-14 days, so there is a risk that you are exposing your own pets to disease. To protect your own animals, foster puppies should be separated from household pets for at least two weeks. They should not share food bowls, water bowls or toys. If your own pet becomes sick for any reason, you are responsible for the cost of veterinary care. The Humane Society of Greater Miami will provide the necessary medications, care and feeding instructions for your foster pet at no charge if it becomes ill.

- Puppies should be de-fleaed before they enter your home and as often as necessary to keep fleas off of them because fleas can spread disease among dogs. **WARNING:** check with your veterinarian before using any chemicals, shampoos or flea control products on your fosterling. A puppy could easily be poisoned or burned by even a small amount of these products. A flea comb with soapy water may be used if fleas are seen.

- Routinely disinfect the crate and surrounding areas before new puppies are introduced. The best way to disinfect the area is to remove all organic material and fecal debris and then soak with a mild bleach solution (1 part bleach to 32 parts water) for at least 30 minutes. Then rinse thoroughly with clean water. Place the puppies in a separate area until crate is dry. All surfaces, bowls, toys, etc need to be disinfected (so you probably want to keep puppies in a room without carpeting, hardwood floors and so forth). If a puppy is diagnosed with Parvo or Distemper, another foster pet will not be

allowed to be introduced for at least 6 months.

- It is possible even with these precautions that resident dogs could be exposed to mild infections. Ask the veterinarian for more information if this is a concern.

GENERAL CARE OF THE PUPPIES

KEEPING THEM SAFE

Do not let the puppies go outside. Puppies are not fully protected from disease until after they have completed their series of vaccines, at about 4 months of age. Until then, puppies are in danger of contracting several highly contagious and often fatal diseases such as parvovirus and distemper. To prevent disease and parasites, do not let puppies play or go to the bathroom in outdoor areas where other dogs may have been (at the park, etc.).

Indoors, young puppies should be kept in a large box, carrier or crate lined with newspaper for easy cleaning. It is very important to keep the puppies warm. The heating pad should be placed under HALF of the newspaper and set on "low." The more puppies in your litter, the better able they will be to keep warm by sleeping together in a heap. Small litters and singletons need more help keeping warm. Keep puppies away from heaters or cold drafts.

SOCIALIZATION

Part of your job is to convince the puppies that humans are kind and loving. Outgoing, friendly puppies can be cuddled and played with freely, after spending a day or so to accustom themselves to a comfy box in a quiet room. Shy puppies will need more encouragement. Try sitting on the floor with a puppy held against your chest, supported underneath, and facing outwards, so he can't see how big and scary you are. Stroke him and speak gently, telling him how cute and brave and fabulous he is. Continue this for about 30 seconds, then put him down before he starts squirming. You want this to be a pleasant experience. The puppy will not be impressed, but if you cuddle him often enough, he will learn to love it. Sometimes holding a pair of puppies helps - they seem to reassure each other. Timid puppies are a special challenge to socialize. The earlier timid puppies are separated from their litter, the more likely they are to adapt to people. If your puppies are fearful and run away when you approach, try sitting or lying quietly on the floor near them and let them come to you. Spend time quietly in their presence to get them accustomed to your company. Stroke them and talk to them gently while they are eating to further reinforce positive associations.

Any introductions of the puppies to other animals should be made with great care and under constant supervision.

There is no such thing as a "bad" puppy. It is useless to punish a "naughty" puppy. Their little minds do not grasp deductive reasoning. Try distracting a mischievous puppy with something else until he forgets whatever he was doing.

GENERAL CONCEPTS OF FEEDING

NEVER give a puppy cow's milk (or anything else besides the specified formula). Commercially available puppy formula should be given at the puppy's body temperature, about 100 degrees. Once the can is opened or the powder reconstituted, unused formula should be kept refrigerated and discarded after 24 hours.

It is best to feed the puppies one-by-one, and on a counter top. This allows them to feed with all four feet on the counter, and their heads level, much as they would if they were nursing from their mom. Some puppies prefer to nurse standing on their hind legs while holding the bottle. They will require a little support from you in this position. Gently open a puppy's mouth with one finger and place the tip of the nipple on his tongue. If he won't eat, try stroking him. Pull lightly on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking. Be sure to tilt the bottle up slightly to prevent the puppy from swallowing too much air. Do not force the puppy to nurse, or allow him to nurse too fast. Avoid feeding a puppy while he is cradled on his back to prevent milk from getting in his lungs.

After each feeding, the puppy should be burped. Hold him against your shoulder and gently massage his back or pat it lightly.

Overfeeding is as dangerous as underfeeding puppies! Keep an eye on your puppies at feeding time and monitor how much each is eating. If you see signs of diarrhea, separate them until you find out which one is sick. Your puppies will generally regulate their own food intake. If they need more food, they may whine or suck on their litter mates. A good indication that they are getting enough to eat is the size of their bellies. They should be filled out after a meal, but not bloated.

If puppies are not urinating and defecating on their own, they will need to be stimulated. This should be done every few hours (often right after feeding) by gently rubbing a warm wet paper towel on the puppy's anus and genital area. They will pee and poop into the paper towel.

GROOMING

A mother works hard to keep her puppies clean, grooming them thoroughly to remove any sticky messes they may get into, such as puppy food or feces. Keeping puppies clean in the absence of their mother can be a messy business, but it is extremely important. A flea comb will get rid of dried feces in the fur. You can also stroke a puppy with a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic a mother's tongue. Be sure to dry him well so he won't chill. Sometimes dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between the puppy's toes. This may be softened and removed by dipping the puppy's back end and toes into a basin of warm water.

EXPECTATIONS AND CARE AT EACH AGE

Birth - 1 Week

Feeding: The initial amount of formula and frequency of feeding should be determined by the veterinarian. If the bitch is with the puppies, they should nurse

vigorously and compete for nipples. Make sure the puppies change nipples in case there is something wrong with the flow of a nipple. Newborns can nurse up to 45 minutes at a time. Be sure to watch puppies nursing at least once a day, if the bitch will permit it. Check that everyone is nursing and that there isn't too much jockeying for position. A great deal of activity and crying could indicate a problem with milk flow, quality or availability. When the bitch reenters the box, there should be some fussing for only a few minutes before everyone has settled down to serious nursing. The veterinarian should check them on a weekly basis to determine progress, weight and changes in amount of food being given and frequency.

Environment: The temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm at 85° – 92° F. Chilling is the number one danger to newborn puppies.

Behavior and training: At one week of age, the puppies should be handled minimally. Puppies will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%.

1-2 weeks

Feeding: Bottle feed formula every 2 - 3 hours until the puppies are full, but not bloated.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be 85°.

Behavior and training: Ear canals open between 8 – 10 days. Eyes will open between 8 and 14 days. They open gradually, usually starting to open from the nose outward. All puppies are born with blue eyes, and initially no pupils can be distinguished from the irises. The eyes will appear solid dark blue.

Healthy puppies will be round and warm, with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back. Healthy puppies seldom cry unless they are hungry or bloated. To determine the sex of the puppies, hold a puppy tummy-up in your hand. In females, the vulva is a vertical slit above the anus; they are very close together. In males, the penile opening is above the anus, but they are separated by a raised scrotal sac and thus seem far apart. It is easiest to see the differences between the sexes if you examine all the puppies and then find two who don't have matching equipment.

2-3 weeks

Feeding: Bottle feed formula every 3 - 4 hours until the puppies are full, but not bloated.

Environment: The floor temperature of the nest box should be 80°.

Behavior and training: If there is a bitch, she will begin to spend larger periods of time out of the nest, though she will not go far from it.

Puppies begin to crawl around day 18. Puppies can stand by day 21. Puppies will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails and paws even before their teeth have come in. Their milk teeth are cut during this period. Puppies learn to sit and touch objects with their paws.

Puppies begin their socialization phase - they will be strongly influenced by the behavior

of their mother for the next six weeks. To further socialize puppies, increase the amount of handling, and get them accustomed to human contact. It is important not to expose them to anything frightening; children may seem intimidating and should be supervised closely while visiting to ensure gentle handling.

3-4 weeks

Feeding: Bottle feed every 4 hours until the puppies are full, but not bloated. Puppies may start lapping from a bowl.

Environment: The floor temperature of the nest box should be 80°.

Behavior and training: Continue to increase gentle socialization with the puppies.

4-5 weeks

Feeding: Bottle feed as needed to keep pups from crying from hunger. They can usually drink and eat from a saucer by 4 weeks. Weaning should be done gradually. Introduce them to solid food by offering warmed canned food, mixed with a little water into a gruel, in a shallow saucer. You can begin by placing one puppy by the plate of canned food gruel. If she starts eating, her littermates will probably copy her and do the same. But without the bitch around to show them, many puppies do not have a clue about feeding time. The puppies will walk in it, slide in it, and track it all over the place. Sometimes one will begin lapping right away, and in its anxiety to consume as much as it can, it will often bite the edge of the plate. Some will prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers. Some will start licking your finger after they sniff it, then slowly lower your finger to the plate and hold it to the food. The puppies need to learn to eat with their heads bent down. Sometimes it takes two or three meals before they catch on. If they do not seem interested enough to even sniff your finger, try gently opening the puppies' mouth and rubbing a little of the food on their teeth or roof of their mouth. Hopefully then they will start licking your finger. If they're still not getting the idea, you can take a syringe (without a needle) and squirt a small amount of gruel into their mouths.

Be sure that the puppies have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl.

Environment: The floor temperature of the nest box should be between 70° – 75° from this point onward.

Behavior and training: Begin house training at 4 weeks. Use a pile of newspaper in a corner. After each feeding, place the puppy on the newspapers or outside for him to go to the bathroom. Be patient! He may not remember to do this every time, or he may forget where to find the papers, but he will learn quickly. Be sure to give the puppies' lots of praise when they use the papers or when they go to the bathroom outside. It is a good idea to confine the puppies to a relatively small space, because the larger the area the puppies have to play in, the more likely they will forget where the papers are. If possible, especially when there are only one or two pups, use a crate to train them. Keep the papers clean and away from their food.

5-6 weeks

Feeding: Feed gruel 4 times a day. Thicken gruel gradually. Introduce dry food and water.

Behavior and training: At about five weeks, puppies can start to roam around the room, under supervision. The strongest, most curious puppy will figure out how to get out of the nest. The others will quickly follow. Play with your puppies daily. You can get them used to your presence by sitting in the middle of the room making phone calls; this way they hear your voice but do not feel threatened. Make them an important part of your household activities: accustom them to the sounds of the TV, dish washer, dryer and other household sounds.

6-7 weeks

Feeding: Should be eating dry food well. Feed the puppies at least three meals daily. Bear in mind that a puppy at this age has a very small stomach, so they may not eat much at a single sitting. They like to eat at frequent intervals throughout the day.

Behavior and training: By this time, puppies will wash themselves, play games with you or toys and come when called. Reintroduce them to their papers or the outdoors after meals, during play sessions, and after naps. These are the usual times that puppies need to use the bathroom.

7-8 weeks

Feeding: Offer dry food 3 - 4 times a day. Leave down a bowl of water for them to drink at will. DO NOT feed the puppies' table scraps.

8+ Weeks

Feeding: Offer dry food 3 times a day. Leave down a bowl of water for them to drink at will.

Behavior and training: By the end of this week, the puppies should be physically and socially ready to live in a new home. Take a deep breath, and prepare yourself to return them to the Society so that we may find them a new home. They are also old enough for early spay or neuter.

A PUPPY'S HEALTH

A healthy puppy has bright eyes, a sleek coat, and a plump belly. Younger puppies are content to sleep between feedings. As they approach 7 weeks they begin to spend more time playing. A puppy's health can deteriorate at an alarming rate. A pup can go from looking healthy and bright to being gravely ill in only a matter of hours. If you have a sick puppy, you should call your veterinarian and discuss the problem or bring it to the Shelter Veterinarian for a check-up. Digestive problems are indicated by a lack of appetite, diarrhea, vomiting or constipation. Respiratory problems are indicated by coughing, sneezing and ocular or nasal discharge.

Normal Rectal Temperature for Healthy Puppies: 100°-102.2° F

Normal Heart Rate for Healthy Puppies (while at rest): 120 - 180 beats per minute

Normal Respiratory Rate for Healthy Puppies (while at rest):

16 – 26 breaths per minute

How To Tell If A Puppy May Need Medical Care

This section modified from *How to Tell if a Cat or a Dog May Need Veterinary Care* from the Humane Society of the United States' Animal Sheltering magazine.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

Animal SHOULD BE bright, alert, responsive, hydrated, balanced, coordinated, oriented, interested in its surroundings and the temperature should be normal.

Animal SHOULD NOT BE very thin or showing any wounds, abscesses, swellings, lumps, bumps, or umbilical hernias. Other abnormalities are when animal appears uncoordinated, tilts head, repeatedly turns around in circles, has a bloated abdomen, has abnormal temperature, appears lethargic, hyperactive, disoriented or dehydrated (skin does not spring back immediately after being raised).

EYES

SHOULD BE clean, clear, bright and responsive to stimuli.

SHOULD NOT BE watery, red, filmy, cloudy, discolored, showing third eyelid, dry, swollen, hypersensitive to light, painful, itchy, constricted or showing discharge. Pupils should not be different sizes, overly dilated or constricted.

EARS

SHOULD BE clean (both outer ear and canal), the inner ear should be pink, and they should be responsive to noise.

SHOULD NOT BE showing discharge, be crusty, inflamed, red, scabby, itchy (the animal will shake its head or scratch ear).

NOSE

SHOULD BE clean and free of discharge.

SHOULD NOT BE scabbed, crusty, cracked, congested, blocked or showing discharge (clear, mucous, blood or pus).

MOUTH

SHOULD BE free of odor and teeth should be clean. Gums should be pink and have good capillary refill time (pink gum color returns within 1-2 seconds after being pressed with finger) and the animal appears to swallow normally.

SHOULD NOT BE unusually red, drooling, characterized by a foul odor or showing discharge. Gums should not be pale, purple, white, or inflamed. Teeth should not be broken or loose and the animal should not have trouble swallowing.

BREATHING/RESPIRATION

SHOULD BE clear-sounding with a normal respiration rate.

SHOULD NOT BE irregular or rapid, shallow, labored, coughing, wheezing or excessive sneezing.

SKIN/FUR

SHOULD BE bright, glossy and appears to be well-groomed, skin is clean, free of oil, swellings, lumps and lesions.

SHOULD NOT BE dull, oily or dirty, coat should not be thinning or matted, skin should not be dry, flaking, red, irritated, scabbed or bleeding and should not be infested with mites, fleas or ticks.

LEGS/FEET

SHOULD BE functioning normally, pads should be clean and smooth, nails should look healthy.

SHOULD NOT BE limping, weak or uncoordinated. Pads should not be cracked, hard or have matted fur between them.

ANAL/GENITAL AREA

SHOULD BE clean and free of discharge.

SHOULD NOT HAVE discharge, lumps or swelling. Stool should not be bloody or watery, animal should not be constipated, both testicles should be descended and should be approximately the same size. If a puppy has diarrhea, dehydration may soon follow.

PROBLEMS TO WATCH FOR

Poor appetite is an early symptom of a potentially serious problem. If your puppy has not eaten in 12 hours, call your veterinarian or bring it to the Humane Society. If you have more than one puppy, compare them to the other members of the litter.

Diarrhea in puppies is usually caused by parasites, viruses, bacteria, food changes, stress and overfeeding. If the diarrhea is mild and the puppy is otherwise alert and playful, you can try giving it less food but more often. If the diarrhea is severe, lasts more than 3 or 4 feedings, or contains blood or obvious parasites, you should bring it to the Humane Society for an evaluation.

Vomiting If your puppy is vomiting, it is possible that he is eating his meals too quickly or is being overfed. Watch him to see if this is the case. If the puppy vomits 2-3 times in a row, call your veterinarian or bring it to the Humane Society.

Parasites The most common parasites seen in puppies are roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, Coccidia, Giardia and bacteria. Some can be seen in the stool, vomitus or around their anal area. If large in number, they can cause anemia, diarrhea and death. The eggs of roundworms and hookworms can persist for months in soil and be spread to other dogs or children, so it is important to deworm pups as directed by your Humane Society Veterinarian. If you see worms in the stool, vomitus, anal area or your puppy has diarrhea, bring it to the Humane Society for treatment.

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. They cause intense itching, noted by scratching behind the ears and violent head shaking. Inside the ears you may see a crumbly, dark brown discharge, which may smell bad (the discharge closely resembles coffee grounds). Ear mites are contagious to other dogs and cats and can be treated with ear drops or an injection from your HSGM veterinarian.

Fading puppies Once in a while, one or more puppies in a litter that were healthy and vigorous at birth will begin to “fade” after a week or two of life. They will stop growing; begin to lose weight, stop nursing and crawling. They may cry continuously and lose the ability to stay upright. Puppies fade very quickly - they will not last 48 hours without veterinary care, and probably will not recover even with intensive care. There is no clear cause or reason for this condition. It has been linked to birth defects, environmental stress and infectious disease. Early veterinary treatment is imperative, but even with tube feeding, rehydration and monitoring, many, if not most fading puppies will die.

Fleas are insects that love to feed on puppies. Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas commonly attack in large numbers and an infestation can literally lead to anemia and even death. It is essential that your home be free of fleas before bringing home a small puppy. Adult fleas lay eggs, which usually drop off their animal host and accumulate in alarming numbers where the animal spends a lot of time. Dog houses, carpets, sofas and other such places are often good nesting grounds for flea eggs. Under ideal conditions, eggs hatch in 1 - 2 days but can take as long as 3 - 4 weeks before hatching. Flea eggs hatch into a larval stage which feeds on debris and organic matter and lives freely in the environment outdoors or your home. Fleas and flea larvae can be eliminated with Borax powder and then vacuuming the area.

If your foster puppy already has fleas, it is important to remove them without harming the puppy. One safe way to remove fleas from very young puppies (less than 6 - 8 weeks) is daily flea combing. For all puppies frequent combing with a flea comb is extremely important. Keep a jar of soapy water near you to dip the comb into as it comes off the pup full of fleas. If the puppy is less than 6 weeks old and heavily infested, a flea bath may be necessary to save its life. This should only be done at HSGM. It is very dangerous for the puppy to be exposed to certain products and keeping it warm and dry is very important. If the pup is older than 6 weeks, you can use topical one-time/month applications available from your HSGM veterinarian.

WARNING: check with your veterinarian before using any chemicals, shampoos, or flea control products on your fosterling or the environment. A puppy that is very young could easily be poisoned or burned by even a small amount of these products.

All bedding needs to be washed in hot soapy water as soon as fleas are spotted.

The most effective way to remove eggs from the house is by using a vacuum cleaner. The vacuum bag should first be treated by placing flea powder, a piece of flea collar, or flea spray inside it. The bag should be emptied immediately after vacuuming.

TAKING THE TEMPERATURE

If it is necessary to take the temperature of your puppy, you will need a regular human thermometer and some KY Jelly. Don't forget to shake down the mercury in the thermometer first. Wipe KY on the thermometer and insert just the tip into the puppy's anus. Hold it there for at least a minute and then read. If the puppy's temperature is over 103° or under 99°, it is important to visit the veterinarian.

My veterinarian's phone number is: _____

My 24-hour emergency vet's phone number is: _____