

The Whelping Box

Temperature & Environment Guide

COOLER ROOM + WARMED ZONE + COOLER ESCAPE ZONE

Temperature guidance refers to different places. Do not set the whole room to a first-week nesting-zone temperature. Provide localized, controlled warmth with accessible cooler space, and monitor the actual puppies.

FIRST-WEEK REFERENCE POINTS	
ROOM AIR	Purdue 75-80 F; Dr. Marty Greer approximately 75 F
WARM NESTING ZONE	Purdue 85-90 F (localized area)
HEATED CONTACT SURFACE	Dr. Greer 90-95 F (surface, NOT room air)
COOLER ZONE	Accessible away from supplemental heat

Age-related environmental guidance

Week 1	Room 75-80 F	Whelping box warm zone 85-90 F
Week 2	Room 70-80 F	Whelping box warm zone 80-85 F
Week 3	Room 70-75 F	Whelping box warm zone 75-80 F

These ranges are from Purdue University Canine Welfare Science and are practical reference points, not universally validated settings for every litter. Adjust in consultation with your veterinarian for dam presence, litter size, puppy health, bedding and how heat is delivered.

What to measure

- Room air at dam level and puppy level, away from the heating source.
- Actual temperature where pups lie: warmed bedding/surface and cooler area.
- Puppy body temperature when a puppy is weak, cold, unusually quiet or not nursing.

Red flags

Persistent crying or restlessness; unusually weak or quiet puppy; poor suckling; puppies unable to leave heat; very hot bedding; cool puppy body temperature; panting dam avoiding the box. These signs require reassessment; a weak, cold or non-nursing puppy needs prompt veterinary advice.

Practical setup & daily checks

Provide thermal choice

Warm only part of the whelping box; preserve a comfortably cooler area. Make sure pups can reach the areas safely and cannot become trapped against a hot surface.

Protect the dam

Allow the dam to leave the warmer nesting area and rest in cooler room air. If she avoids nursing because she is uncomfortable, reassess the setup.

Use heat safely

Use thermostatic control and measure at bedding level. Prevent direct contact with heating elements, hot water bottles or unsafe heating pads. Check for fire and burn hazards.

Keep bedding dry and stable

Use non-slip, clean, dry bedding; avoid drafts at floor level. Recheck when replacing bedding because thickness changes surface temperatures.

Do not use behavior alone

Huddling, dispersal or quietness can provide clues but do not replace measurement or assessment of nursing, vigor and weight.

When in doubt, call

A weak, cold, limp, nonresponsive or poorly nursing newborn warrants prompt veterinary evaluation. Do not force-feed a chilled or weak puppy; improper feeding risks aspiration.

Record checks

Date / time	Room air (F)	Warm zone (F)	Cool zone (F)	Humidity (%)	Notes / action

Veterinary review

Veterinarian: _____ Date: _____

Approved / revised guidance: _____

Sources and scope

- Purdue University Canine Welfare Science: Setting Up a Welfare-Friendly Whelping Area
- AKC / Dr. Marty Greer: How to Detect and Manage Risk Factors in Newborn Puppies
- Merck Veterinary Manual: Environmental Warmth Required for Neonatal Dogs and Cats

Educational reference - pending independent veterinarian review.