

How can I protect my cat from toxoplasmosis?

Protecting your cat from toxoplasmosis may also help to protect you from toxoplasmosis.

- Feed your cat commercial dry or canned food.
- Never feed cats raw meat because this can be a source of *Toxoplasma* infection.
- Keep indoor cats indoors so they do not become infected by eating small animals.

Do I have to get rid of my cat?

No, you do not have to give up your cat. Owning a cat does not mean you will be infected with the disease. It is unlikely that you would be exposed to the parasite by touching an infected cat because cats usually do not carry the parasite on their fur. In addition, cats kept indoors that do not hunt prey or are not fed raw meat are not likely to be infected with *Toxoplasma*. But, if you are pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant, or have a weakened immune system, it is important to protect yourself from infection.

Can toxoplasmosis be treated?

Yes. There is treatment for toxoplasmosis. In an otherwise healthy person, mild symptoms typically go away within several weeks to months and treatment is not needed. However, treatment may be recommended for an otherwise healthy person with eye disease that is due to toxoplasmosis.

A woman who becomes infected during pregnancy can be treated with medication that may protect her unborn baby from toxoplasmosis. Mother and baby should be watched closely during the pregnancy and after the baby is born.

Protect Yourself from Toxoplasmosis

- Change litter boxes daily.
 - If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system, ask someone else to change the litter box. But, if you must change it, wear gloves and wash your hands with soap and water afterwards.
 - Wear gloves while gardening and wash your hands after gardening.
 - Cover any outdoor sandboxes when not in use.
 - Avoid stray cats, especially kittens
 - Do not eat raw or undercooked meat.
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- Feed your cat only commercial dry or canned food.
 - Never feed your cats raw meat.
 - Keep indoor cats indoors.

Toxoplasmosis

An Important Message for Cat Owners



For more information on toxoplasmosis go to:
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/toxoplasmosis/default.htm



What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a microscopic parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. More than 60 million people in the United States carry the *Toxoplasma* parasite. Toxoplasmosis can cause severe illness in infants infected before birth (when their mothers are newly infected during pregnancy), or in persons with a weakened immune system.

What role do cats play in the spread of toxoplasmosis?

Cats get *Toxoplasma* infection by eating infected rodents, birds or other small animals, or anything contaminated with feces from another cat that is releasing the parasite. After a cat has been



infected, it can release the parasite in its feces for up to two weeks. The parasite becomes infective one or two days after it is passed in the feces of the cat. The parasite can live in the environment for many months and contaminate, soil, water, fruits and vegetables, sandboxes, grass where animals graze for food, litter boxes, or any place where an infected cat may have defecated.

How are people infected with Toxoplasma?

People become infected with toxoplasmosis through several ways:

- Eating food, drinking water, or accidentally swallowing soil that has been contaminated with infected cat feces.
- Eating raw or undercooked meat from animals (especially pigs, lamb, or deer) that have been infected with *Toxoplasma*.
- Directly from pregnant woman to unborn child when the mother becomes infected with *Toxoplasma* during pregnancy.

What are the symptoms of toxoplasmosis?

Individuals with healthy immune systems:

Most people who become infected with *Toxoplasma* do not know it. However, when illness occurs it is usually mild. Some may feel like they have the "flu," with swollen lymph glands, or muscle aches and pains that last for several weeks or more. Rarely, eye disease occurs. Some people do not have symptoms at all.

Individuals with weakened immune systems:

People with weakened immune systems may experience severe symptoms. The most common symptoms in people with HIV infection are headache, confusion, and fever. Other symptoms include seizures, poor coordination, and nausea or vomiting.

Infants infected before birth:

Most infants infected with *Toxoplasma* before birth show no symptoms at birth. However, most are likely to develop symptoms later in life. These include vision loss, mental disability, and seizures.

How can I protect myself from toxoplasmosis?

Several steps can be taken to protect yourself and others from toxoplasmosis:

- Change litter boxes daily. *Toxoplasma* takes more than one day to become infectious.
- If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system, ask someone else to change the litter box. If this is not possible, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water afterwards.
- Cover any outdoor sandboxes when not in use to keep cats from defecating in them.
- Avoid stray cats, especially kittens. Younger cats are more like to be releasing *Toxoplasma* in their feces.
- Do not eat undercooked meat. Cook meat until the internal temperature reaches 160°F.
- Wash all kitchen supplies (such as knives and cutting boards) that have been in contact with raw meat.
- If you have a weakened immune system, it is important to talk to your health care provider about getting a blood test to determine if you have been infected with *Toxoplasma*.

