



TOXOPLASMOSIS FACT SHEET

What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii* (*T. gondii*). It can infect humans, birds and most warm-blooded animals. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) estimate that more than 60 million Americans may be infected with the parasite.

T. gondii cysts are only found in cat feces. These cysts (eggs) can exist for months in the cat's immediate environment (cat litter, flower beds, or anywhere where cat feces can be found).

How can you or your pets get toxoplasmosis?

You or your pets can get the parasite by:

- Eating raw or undercooked meat infected with *T. gondii* cysts
- Eating unwashed fruits or vegetables contaminated with cysts
- Drinking water contaminated with cysts
- Accidentally ingesting the parasite by contact with infected cat feces
- An infected mother can transmit the parasite to her child (in the womb)
- Infected organ transplant or blood transfusion (rare)

What are the symptoms of toxoplasmosis?

Symptoms of toxoplasmosis can include:

- Mild or unrecognized illness
- "Flu-like" symptoms such as fever, chills, tiredness, and headache
- Acute illness with fever similar to mononucleosis

Who is most at risk?

Pregnant women and people with weak immune systems are at an increased risk of severe illness if infected with *T. gondii*.

A severe infection can result in damage to the eyes, brain or other organs. Infants born to mothers who have been newly infected during or just before pregnancy can develop serious health problems. A new infection in a pregnant woman can result in abortion and congenital defects that could be fatal.

What should pregnant women know about toxoplasmosis?

Pregnant women or those planning to conceive should discuss testing for exposure to *T. gondii* with their physician.

What is the treatment for toxoplasmosis?

Treatment is not usually recommended for healthy individuals. High risk individuals should consult their healthcare provider.

How can toxoplasmosis be prevented?

There are several steps you can take to reduce your chances of becoming infected:

- Do not eat raw or undercooked meat.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk.
- Do not drink non-chlorinated water.
- Peel or wash fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Do not feed raw or undercooked meat to your pets.
- Do not give your pets unpasteurized milk.
- Do not allow cats to hunt or roam.
- Keep children's sandboxes covered.
- Wash hands, cooking utensils and food preparation surfaces after contact with raw meat.
- Wash hands before eating.
- Wear gloves when gardening or during contact with anything that could be infected with the parasite.
- Wash hands after gardening or contact with soil or litter boxes.
- Control rodent and insect populations.
- Clean litter boxes daily.
- Pregnant women or those with weak immune systems should not clean the litter box.

Where can I get more information on toxoplasmosis?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of information: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)