

**What is toxoplasmosis?**

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a one-celled parasite. Infection happens most often by eating or drinking food or water contaminated by the feces (stool) of infected cats. It may also result from eating infected meat that is served raw or undercooked. The parasites can spread from an infected pregnant woman to her baby.

**Who can be infected?**

Anyone. The disease usually does not cause symptoms, but is of concern for pregnant women, since it may affect pregnancies.

**Are there any problems that can result from toxoplasmosis infection?**

Infection of pregnant women can result in death or brain damage to the baby. Immunosuppressed persons may develop serious health problems after infection.

**What are the symptoms of toxoplasmosis?**

Infection can cause fever, headache, swelling of the lymph glands. Immunosuppressed people (such as people with AIDS or cancer) may have more serious illness. However, many people have no symptoms at all.

**How soon after infection do symptoms appear?**

Fever and headache appear within 5 - 23 days after handling infected cat feces or after eating infected meat.

**Where are the parasites found?**

The parasites are found in cats, especially those that eat rodents or birds. They are also found in the brain and muscles of sheep, goats, swine, cattle, chickens and other birds.

**How long can the parasites cause infection?**

The parasites can survive in fresh cat feces and infect people for 1 - 5 days. Parasites in water or moist soil can infect for up to one year. Infected raw meats can contain the parasite. Freezing does not kill the parasite.

**Can a person get toxoplasmosis again?**

Healthy people probably cannot become infected again. However, immunosuppressed people can become ill again.

**What is the treatment for toxoplasmosis?**

Infections are not treated unless they occur in pregnant women.

**How can toxoplasmosis be prevented?**

1. Always cook meat completely. Never eat raw meat. Freezing meat does not kill the parasites.
2. Feed cat's dry, canned, or boiled food. Do not allow them to hunt rodents or birds for food.
3. Dispose of cat feces and litter daily. Wear gloves when emptying and disinfecting litter pans. Do not shake dried used litter or breathe the dust from it.
4. Pregnant women should not clean litter pans and should avoid all contact with cats who have ever hunted rodents for food.
5. Carefully wash hands with soap and warm water before eating, after handling cats or cleaning litter pans, and after handling raw meats. Wear gloves when gardening.
6. Do not allow cats in sandboxes or sand piles used by children for play. Cover sandboxes when not in use.