



Toxoplasmosis Fact Sheet

What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a 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 which is served raw or undercooked. The parasites can spread from an infected pregnant woman to her baby.

Who can be infected?

Anyone but is of concern for pregnant women since it may affect the baby.

Are there any problems that can result from toxoplasmosis infection?

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

What are the symptoms of infection?

Fever and headache appear within 5 to 23 days after handling infected cat feces or after eating infected meat. Other symptoms include of the lymph glands and a general feeling of oncoming illness. Immunosuppressed people (such as people with AIDS or cancer) may have more serious illness causing damage to the brain, eyes, or other organs. However, many people have no symptoms at all.

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Where are the parasites found?

The parasites are found in cats and other members of the cat family, 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 in fresh cat feces can cause infection for 1 to 5 days. Parasites in water or moist soil can infect for up to one year. Infected meats can contain the parasite for as long as the meat is edible and uncooked. Freezing does not kill the parasite.

Can a person get toxoplasmosis again?

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

What is the treatment for infection?

Infections are not treated in healthy individuals since most recover without treatment. Pregnant women, newborns, infants, and the immunocompromised can be treated, although the parasite is not eliminated completely.

How can toxoplasmosis be prevented?

- Always cook meat completely. Never eat raw meat. Freezing meat does not kill the parasites.

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- Feed cats dry, canned, or boiled food. Do not allow them to hunt rodents or birds for food.
- 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.
- Pregnant women should not clean litter pans and should avoid all contact with cats who have ever hunted rodents for food.
- 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.
- Do not allow stray cats in sandboxes or sand piles used by children for play. Cover sandboxes when not in use.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

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