

Cat Health: Toxoplasmosis



What Is Toxoplasmosis?

It is a disease caused by a parasite (*Toxoplasma gondii*). Cats acquire the parasite by ingesting infected prey or raw meat. When a cat is exposed to this parasite for the first time, the organism will multiply within the cat's intestinal tract and then be shed in the cat's feces for about 10 to 14 days. Although the parasite is not immediately infective to other animals, it is infective after one to five days.

How Will the Parasite Affect Your Cat?

Most cats do not show any symptoms at all. Some cats with weak immune systems will experience lethargy, lack of appetite, breathing difficulty, or eye problems. Cats that become sick from toxoplasmosis can usually be treated with antibiotics and supportive care.

Can You Get Toxoplasmosis from Your Cat?

You can, but it is very unlikely. This is because the parasite is active for such a short period (10 to 14 days) and only the first time the cat is exposed. Also, cats are careful groomers, and so they usually do not have infectious particles on their fur. If your cat is indoor only and does not hunt prey or eat raw meat, then there is little opportunity for your cat to become infected at all.

Why Do People Say that Pregnant Women Should Not Scoop the Litter Box?

If a woman is pregnant when she encounters the *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite for the first time, then there is a chance that it can affect the unborn child. If a woman becomes infected prior to becoming pregnant, then there is no risk to the baby.

How Can You Prevent Infection for Your Cat and You?

- Wear gloves and scoop the litter box at least once a day. Remember that it takes one to five days for the parasite to become infective.
- Eat only fully-cooked meat and do not feed raw or undercooked meat to your cat.
- When working in soil, wear gloves, wash your hands, and thoroughly wash fruits, vegetables, and herbs from your garden.
- Keep outdoor sandboxes covered.
- Keep your cat inside and do not bring a new cat into the home if you are pregnant.

You can learn more at the Centers for Disease Control website here:

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/>