

Toxoplasmosis Fact Sheet

1. **What is Toxoplasmosis?** - Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. The parasite can be found in virtually any warm-blooded animal, but the principal reservoir and source of infection for humans is the domestic cat. Toxoplasmosis is found worldwide. Infected individuals with suppressed immune systems, or those who are pregnant, can develop serious illness. Toxoplasmosis does not usually cause serious illness in healthy individuals.
2. **How common is Toxoplasmosis?** - In the United States, there are about 1,500,000 human infections due to Toxoplasmosis each year, but most go undiagnosed. It is estimated that more than 60,000,000 people in the United States have, at some point in their lives, been infected with the parasite.
3. **How is Toxoplasmosis transmitted?**
 - a. Ingestion of contaminated cat feces dust while cleaning a litter box or working with soil.
 - b. Ingestion of raw or undercooked pork, lamb, or mutton.
 - c. Drinking untreated water that is contaminated with *Toxoplasma gondii*.
 - d. Contamination of knives, cutting boards, or counters and sinks that have had contact with raw or undercooked meat.
 - e. Organ transplants and blood transfusions, although extremely rare.
 - f. Pregnant mothers can transmit the parasite to their unborn child.
4. **What are the symptoms of Toxoplasmosis?** - People with healthy immune systems likely will not recognize they are ill, or they may have mild symptoms such as: fever, nausea, headache, muscle pain, and swollen lymph nodes. Healthy individuals rarely develop eye or heart problems. People with compromised immune systems due to organ transplants, chemotherapy, and HIV/AIDS, can have serious health problems due to Toxoplasmosis. These problems include pneumonia, swelling of the brain, heart damage, and swelling of the liver and spleen. It is estimated that 4,000 people living with AIDS in the United States develop Toxoplasmosis each year.
5. **Are pregnant women at risk of passing Toxoplasmosis to the unborn child?** – Yes. This is called congenital Toxoplasmosis. Effects on the unborn child include stillbirth, abortion, and serious mental and physical developmental problems. It is estimated that up to 400 cases of congenital Toxoplasmosis occur annually in the United States.

6. **Will my cat have symptoms of Toxoplasmosis?** - Cats often have no symptoms. If illness were to occur, it may include signs such as fever, loss of appetite, weight loss, lethargy, coughing, diarrhea, joint pain, and behavioral changes.
7. **How long can my cat spread the parasite?** - Cats will only spread Toxoplasma in their feces for a few weeks following infection with the parasite. The infection will go away without treatment; therefore it does not help to have your cat, or your cat's feces, tested for Toxoplasma.
8. **How is Toxoplasmosis diagnosed?** - Toxoplasmosis is diagnosed by a blood test done by a physician. Results of the test can determine if you have a current Toxoplasmosis infection, or if you have had one in the past.
9. **How is Toxoplasmosis treated?** - Antibiotics can be given to prevent illness.
10. **How can I prevent Toxoplasmosis?**
 - a. Wear gloves when handling soil or gardening and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.
 - b. Wash children's hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after they have played in a sandbox or in soil.
 - c. Prevent cats from using the garden or sandbox as a litter box by keeping cats indoors and covering sandboxes when not in use.
 - d. Avoid touching cat feces and inhaling dust when cleaning the litter box.
 - e. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after cleaning litter box.
 - f. If you are pregnant or have a suppressed immune system, ask someone to clean the litter box for you.
 - g. Do not eat raw meat.
 - h. Cook all meats to 160°F, or until no longer pink.
 - i. Do not feed raw or undercooked meat to your cat.
 - j. Wash all cutting boards, knives, and counters after contact with raw meat.
11. **For more information:** <http://www.cdc.gov/toxoplasmosis/>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animals.