Indiana State Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About…Toxoplasmosis

What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a parasite, *Toxoplasma gondii*. People with this disease may not have any signs or they may a mild illness that causes lymph node swelling, or mono-like signs. The parasite has been found in most mammals like pets, livestock, and humans. For most people, toxoplasmosis is a mild illness. It can be fatal to people with weak immune systems or cause severe problems for unborn children.

How is toxoplasmosis spread?

People get toxoplasmosis by one of several ways:

- Eating unwashed vegetables;
- Eating or touching under-cooked or raw meat;
- Changing litter boxes of cats and not washing hands; and
- Working with soil that has cat feces and not washing hands.

Who is at risk for developing severe toxoplasmosis?

- Babies born to mothers who recently got *Toxoplasma gondii*.
- People with very weak immune systems.

If I am at risk for severe toxoplasmosis, can I keep my cat?

Yes. There are several things you can do to avoid being exposed:

- Change the litter box daily.
- If you are pregnant or have a weak immune system:
    - Avoid changing cat litter. If no one else can change the litter for you, wear gloves that you can throw away and wash your hands with soap and water as soon as you are finished.
    - Do not eat or smoke before washing your hands.

    - Always keep your cat indoors.
    - Do not handle stray cats or kittens. Do not get a new cat while you are pregnant.
- Feed cats only store bought food or well-cooked table food. Never feed your cat raw or under-cooked meats.

How do I know if I have toxoplasmosis?

You cannot tell without seeing your doctor. Your doctor will give you an exam and labs tests.

Most cases are so mild they do not have signs. People who get sick may have body pain, fatigue, fever, sore throat, and muscle pain. Some people may have a mono-like illness with a rash and swollen liver.

Babies that get the parasite before they are born may have vision problems, problems with learning, or be mentally challenged. Some babies may die right after they are born.

How is toxoplasmosis treated?

Most cases of toxoplasmosis do not require drug treatment. Some drugs can help to lessen the signs. Your doctor can prescribe these drugs to you.

How is toxoplasmosis prevented?

- Fully cook all meats and poultry (microwaving should not be used as a cooking method);
- Eat and drink only pasteurized dairy products;
- Change litter boxes daily, throw away all used litter in sealed plastic bags;
- Wash vegetables before eating;
- Cover sand boxes to keep outdoor cats from using them as litter boxes;
- Wash hands of children after playing outside or in a sandbox.
- Always wash hands before you eat or drink.
- Wash hands with soap and water after working with soil or after touching raw meats, poultry, or vegetables.

To lessen the risk of cats getting the parasite, don't allow them outside and feed them only cooked meats or store bought food.

Pregnant women, women thinking of getting pregnant, and people with weak immune systems should take extra steps to prevent getting sick.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: http://www.cdc.gov/toxoplasmosis/.

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