

Toxoplasmosis

What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. It is a leading cause of foodborne death in the U.S. In pregnant women and peoples who are immunocompromised, toxoplasmosis can cause serious health problems.

How is it spread?

- Eating undercooked, contaminated meat (especially pork, lamb, and venison).
- Eating food prepared with contaminated knives, kitchen utensils, and cutting boards.
- Drinking contaminated water.
- Cats are a primary reservoir of *Toxoplasma gondii*. People may accidentally swallow the parasite by coming in contact with contaminated cat feces (for example caring for the litter box).
- A mother can pass it to her baby during pregnancy.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Swollen lymph glands

How is prevented?

- Cook food to safe temperatures using a food thermometer.
- Peel and wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Wash kitchen surfaces and utensils thoroughly after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, or unwashed fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid drinking untreated water.
- Wear gloves when gardening because of the possible exposure to cat feces.
- While pregnant or immunocompromised, avoid caring for the cat litter box.

How is it treated?

Most healthy people recover from toxoplasmosis without treatment. Pregnant women, newborns, and infants can be treated with prescription medication, although the parasite is not eliminated completely. The parasites can remain within tissue cells in a less active phase; their location makes it difficult for the medication to completely eliminate them. Persons with compromised immune systems need to be treated with prescription medication until they have improvement in their condition.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

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