

The Facts about Toxoplasmosis

www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Simple precautions can help protect against this readily preventable disease.

WHAT IS TOXOPLASMOSIS?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a tiny parasite, *Toxoplasma gondii*. This parasite is found in most animals and birds. It is also often present in garden soil and on fresh vegetables. Sooner or later one person in two will pick-up a *Toxoplasma* infection - probably without realising it, as the infection has similar symptoms to a mild flu-like illness. Toxoplasmosis is not usually dangerous to a healthy adult or child. However, if a woman catches toxoplasmosis for the first time whilst she is pregnant there is a risk to the health of her unborn child.



HOW IS IT CAUGHT?

Toxoplasmosis can be caught from:

- Eating raw or undercooked meat
- Unpasteurised goat's milk, yoghurt and cheese
- Unwashed, uncooked fruit and vegetables
- Dirty cat litter
- Soil contaminated with infected cat faeces

GENERAL ADVICE

- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling your pet.
- Children's outdoor sandboxes should be covered to prevent cats using them. Even though your children will not be at risk there is always a chance you could pick up the infection this way.
- If your cat or kitten is unwell take special care with hygiene and consult your vet.
- To avoid concerns over handling cat litter, disposable litter trays can be used.

TAKING PRECAUTIONS

Every mother-to-be should take a few simple precautions during pregnancy:

- Only eat meat which has been cooked thoroughly right through - not just brown on the outside but on the inside too, with no trace of pinkness.
- Always wash your hands before and after preparing raw meat and before eating or handling other foods. Also wash the cooking utensils and chopping boards you have used.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables thoroughly to remove all traces of soil and other potential contaminants.
- Avoid unpasteurised goat's and sheep's milk and their products.
- Always wear rubber gloves when gardening and keep these gloves separate - preferably in the garden shed - from ones you use for housework and washing-up. Remember to check them first for holes or tears.
- Avoid emptying dirty cat litter trays yourself but, if you have to, always wear rubber or polythene gloves. Make sure both faeces and trays are emptied at least daily. *Toxoplasma* oocysts are not infective for at least 24 hours after they have been deposited so, if trays are emptied, disinfected and thoroughly washed once a day, the risks are reduced to an absolute minimum.

SPECIAL NOTE: Be sure you wash away any trace of disinfectant, as any residual smell can easily put off your cat from using the tray again and some coal tar-type disinfectants can be hazardous to cats. Always use a separate bowl or sink and cleansing utensil for this task.



ADVICE FOR CAT OWNERS AND POTENTIAL CAT OWNERS

First of all, don't panic - there is no reason to banish your cat if you become pregnant.

Toxoplasmosis has been around for a very long time and, as you will note, cats are only one of the sources. You can happily continue to handle your cat as usual. However, cats can

excrete toxoplasma eggs in their faeces if they pick up an infection from eating wild birds, mice or raw meat so it is important to take relevant precautions. If you are pregnant and thinking of getting your first cat, have a word with a vet and your doctor first.

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FINDING OUT IF YOU HAVE TOXOPLASMOSIS

Because it has no definite symptoms, it is not easy to diagnose toxoplasmosis. If you are concerned and you are trying to conceive or have just found out you are pregnant, consult your doctor who will be able to advise you about appropriate tests etc.



You can also contact Tommy's Campaign for information and advice on toxoplasmosis, at:
Tommy's The Baby Charity
Nicholas House
3 Laurence Pountney Hill
London, EC4R 0BB
Tel: 08707 70 70 70 / Fax: 08707 70 70 75
Email: mailbox@tommys.org

A FINAL WORD

On average, one in two people will pick up toxoplasmosis during their lifetime, but it is much more likely to come from a food or food-related source than from a cat.

No-one lives in a totally germ-free environment so basic hygiene and cleanliness, starting with meticulous hand-washing will help to eliminate the risk of toxoplasmosis - and many other chance infections.

Remember a healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet means a happy owner!

The Pet Health Council was formed in 1979 with the specific aim of promoting the health and welfare of pet animals in the interests of both pets and people. The PHC works with medical and veterinary advisers who are experts in this field.

The leaflet range currently comprises the following:

Insuring your Pet	Pets and The Family
Choosing a Pet	Your Pet's Teeth
Fit Not Fat	Practical Steps for Healthy Pets
Getting a Puppy	Stressed Pets
Health Benefits of Pets	The Facts about Toxocara
International Pet Travel	The Facts about Toxoplasmosis
Nutrition for Cats and Dogs	Worm Your Dog
Pets and Allergies	Your First Pet

Download leaflets from the PHC website:
www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

The Pet Health Council ₤
working for healthy pets & people

The Five Golden Rules to Successful Pet Ownership

1. Follow a preventive health programme for your pet that includes:
 - a good diet
 - regular exercise
 - worming
 - vaccination
 - annual veterinary check ups
 - health insurance
2. Observe basic hygiene practices around your pet
3. Respect your pet, you have a duty of care, to fulfil your pet's basic needs including privacy and space as well as love and attention
4. Be a responsible owner, clear up after your animal and be considerate of other people and animals
5. Consider the changing needs of your pet throughout his life.

Associated organisations of the Pet Health Council include:

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy, Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, National Office of Animal Health, National Pharmacy Association, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Society for Companion Animal Studies.



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