

## Toxoplasmosis (*Toxoplasma gondii*) Facts

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. This parasite is found everywhere in our environment and many people carry it in their bodies but may not know because they have no symptoms. Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have serious illness due to toxoplasmosis. Pregnant women can pass the infection to their unborn baby if they become infected for the first time during or just before pregnancy.

Cats are important in the spread of toxoplasmosis because they can shed the parasite in their feces. People can get toxoplasmosis by accidentally ingesting contaminated cat feces, this can occur if you accidentally touch your hands to your mouth after gardening or cleaning a cat's litter box. People can also get toxoplasmosis by eating or handling raw or undercooked pork, lamb or venison, eating unwashed fruits and vegetables grown in soil contaminated with cat feces, drinking contaminated water, or rarely from a blood transfusion or infected organ transplant.

Your health care provider may do a blood test to check for antibodies to *toxoplasma* if you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system.

### How to prevent toxoplasmosis

- Wear gloves when you garden or do anything outdoors that involves handling soil. Wash your hands well with soap and water after outdoor activities, especially before you eat or prepare any food.
- When preparing raw meat, wash any cutting boards, sinks, knives, and other utensils that might have touched the raw meat thoroughly with soap and hot water to avoid cross-contaminating other foods. Wash your hands well with soap and water after handling raw meat.
- Cook all meat thoroughly; to an internal temperature of 160° F and until it is no longer pink in the center or until the juices become clear. Do not taste meat before it is fully cooked.
- Freeze meat for several days before cooking to inactivate the parasite and reduce the likelihood of infection.
- Wash and/or peel all fruits and vegetables before eating them.

### If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system:

- Avoid changing the cat litter box yourself; let someone else do it. If you have to change it, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands with soap and water afterwards.
- Change the litter box daily because the parasite is not infectious until 1-5 days after it is shed in the feces.
- Help prevent your cat from becoming infected by keeping it indoors and feeding it only canned or dry cat food. Do not feed your cat raw meat.
- Avoid stray cats and kittens and cover your outdoor sandboxes.
- Do not get a new cat while you are pregnant.

**If you have questions about Toxoplasmosis, please talk with your health care provider.**

### For additional information on toxoplasmosis:

- Call the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-201-5414
- Visit the MDH Toxoplasmosis website at [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us)

