

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## TOXOPLASMOSIS

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a single-celled parasite named *Toxoplasma gondii*. It is found throughout the world. Many people in the United States probably have had toxoplasmosis and never knew, because the immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness.

### Symptoms

- Symptoms similar to “the flu”:
  - A general feeling of discomfort or tiredness
  - Fever
  - Muscle soreness
- In people with immune system problems (such as HIV/AIDS, cancer patients, or people with an organ transplant), the parasite may cause serious damage to the brain, eyes, heart, and lungs.
- Infants infected before birth can be born with mental or physical problems.

### Transmission

- *Toxoplasma* usually infects cats. Following a toxoplasmosis infection, the cat sheds parasite eggs in its stool (poop) for up to three weeks. Like humans, the cat may become infected but not show any signs of being sick. The eggs can survive on their own in soil or the litter box for up to 18 months.
- Hands may be contaminated when gardening, cleaning a litter box or touching anything that has come into contact with cat feces. Later, when a person touches his or her mouth, the parasites can enter.
- Toxoplasmosis can also be transmitted from eating raw or under cooked meat (usually pork, lamb, or wild game) from infected animals.
- A woman who is pregnant when she is **first** infected with the parasite can pass the infection to her baby.
- Very rarely, people may get toxoplasmosis from organ transplantation or transfusion.

### Treatment

- Usually no treatment is necessary and people get better on their own.
- People with weakened immune systems should see a health care provider since they are at greater risk for severe toxoplasmosis. In such cases, an infection that occurred anytime during life can reactivate.

### Prevention

- Feed cats only dry, canned, or cooked food. Prevent cats from catching birds or mice. Indoor cats should remain indoors, and outdoor cats should remain outdoors. Cat boxes should be cleaned daily.
- Cook all meat thoroughly, that is, until it is no longer pink in the center or until the juices run clear.
- Pregnant women or people with immune system problems can take these precautions:
  - Wear gloves when you garden or do anything outdoors that involves handling soil. Wash your hands well with soap and warm water after outdoor activities.
  - Have someone who is healthy and not pregnant handle raw meat for you, or wear gloves. Wash your hands well with soap and warm water afterwards.
  - Do not bring a new cat into the house while pregnant. Have someone else clean the litter box.
- If you are planning on becoming pregnant, you may consider being tested for *Toxoplasma*. If the test is positive, there is no need to worry about passing the infection to your baby.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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