A decorative graphic of stylized leaves in shades of purple, teal, and green, positioned on the left side of the page.

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a small parasite. It is found in humans, animals, and birds. Cats play a role in the spread of toxoplasmosis.

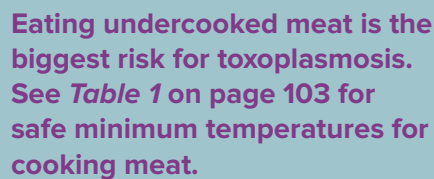
Toxoplasmosis

Cats and kittens can get toxoplasmosis by eating infected small animals. The parasite is then passed in the cat's feces. This can infect their litter box, sand boxes, and soil or dirt in gardens and yards. Kittens and cats can pass millions of parasites in their feces.

How is toxoplasmosis spread?

- ◆ Eating undercooked meat rewrite: (e.g., beef, lamb, pork, poultry, wild game).
- ◆ Touching your mouth after:
 - Working in infected soil.
 - Changing cat litter boxes without wearing gloves. Be sure to clean your hands after.
- ◆ Eating fruits and vegetables that are not washed or peeled.

- ◆ Handling raw meat without washing your hands afterwards.
- ◆ Using unwashed knives, cutting boards, and surfaces that have been in contact with raw meat or other food.
- ◆ Drinking water that is infected with the parasite.

A light blue rounded rectangular callout box with a decorative leaf graphic on the right side.

Eating undercooked meat is the biggest risk for toxoplasmosis. See *Table 1* on page 103 for safe minimum temperatures for cooking meat.

What are the signs of toxoplasmosis?

You may have no signs of sickness. Or, you may have:

- ◆ Muscle aches and pains.
- ◆ Headache.
- ◆ Fever.
- ◆ Sore throat.
- ◆ Enlarged lymph nodes.
- ◆ Feel like you “have the flu.”

If you are pregnant and have no signs of the illness, your unborn baby can still be affected.



How do you know you have toxoplasmosis?

The only way to know if you have toxoplasmosis is by a medical exam. Your health care provider can examine you and test your blood for it. If a pregnant woman is infected, other tests can show if the unborn baby has toxoplasmosis.

How is it treated?

Toxoplasmosis can be treated and cured with antibiotics. Always finish antibiotic treatment.

What can happen to you if you are not treated for toxoplasmosis?

- ◆ Severe cases can affect the brain, lungs, eyes, heart, or liver. Infection can spread to the baby during pregnancy, labor, or birth.
- ◆ For the mother, the toxoplasmosis infection is often mild. She may not even know she has it.
- ◆ For the baby, infection can cause severe problems. These are worse when the mother gets the infection early in pregnancy. Infection of the baby may:
 - Cause early birth.
 - Damage the baby's eyes, nervous system, skin, and ears.
 - Not show for months or years. If not treated, eye or brain problems can occur.



For more on how to clean hands, see *Clean Hands* on page 119.

How can you avoid toxoplasmosis?

- ◆ Learn how to handle food safely. This can reduce the risk of toxoplasmosis and other food-borne illness for you and your family.
- ◆ Avoid cat litter. If you have to change litter, wear disposable gloves. Clean your hands well with soap and water after.
- ◆ Feed your cat store-bought dry or canned food. Do not feed your cat raw or undercooked meats.
- ◆ Keep cats indoors. This will keep the cat from hunting birds and rodents that might be infected.
- ◆ Avoid stray cats and kittens.
- ◆ Do not get a new cat while you are pregnant.
- ◆ Keep all sandboxes covered. This will stop cats from using them as litter boxes.
- ◆ Wear gloves when gardening or during contact with soil or sand. Clean hands well after gardening or contact with soil or sand.

For more on toxoplasmosis see:

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

Toxoplasmosis

www.hiv.va.gov/patient/diagnosis/OI-toxoplasmosis.asp

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Parasites – Toxoplasmosis (Toxoplasma infection)

www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/

Toxoplasmosis and Pregnancy

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/pregnancy_gateway/infections-toxo.html