

What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a disease that results from infection with the *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite. This organism is one of the world's most common parasites.

How is toxoplasmosis spread?

You can't "catch" it from a person. You may get it if you:

- Come into contact with cat feces that contain the parasite
- Eat contaminated food or drink contaminated water
- Use contaminated knives, cutting boards or other utensils
- Eat unwashed fruits and vegetables
- Receive an infected organ transplant or transfused blood
- Transmit it from mother-to-child.

What are the signs and symptoms of toxoplasmosis?

You may not know if you've contracted toxoplasmosis, although some people may develop symptoms similar to those of the flu including:

- Body aches
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Headache
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Occasionally, a sore throat
- Blurred vision
- Eye pain

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Healthy people who become infected often do not have symptoms because their immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness. When illness occurs, it is usually mild with "flu-like" symptoms that last for several weeks and then go away. However, the parasite remains in their body in an inactive state, and can become reactivated if the person becomes immunosuppressed. The *Toxoplasma* parasite does not become infectious until 1 to 5 days after it is shed in a cat's feces.

Who is most at risk?

- Infants born to mothers who are newly infected with *Toxoplasma gondii* during or just before pregnancy.
- Most infants who are infected while still in the womb have no symptoms at birth, but they may develop symptoms later in life. A small percentage of infected newborns have serious eye or brain damage at birth.
- Persons with severely weakened immune systems, such as individuals with AIDS, those taking certain types of chemotherapy, and those who have recently received an organ transplant.

What type of health problems are caused by toxoplasmosis?

Severe toxoplasmosis can cause damage to the brain, eyes, or other organs, and can develop from a severe *Toxoplasma* infection

or one that had occurred earlier in life and is now reactivated. Severe cases are more likely in individuals who have weak immune systems, though occasionally, even persons with healthy immune systems may experience eye damage from toxoplasmosis.

How is toxoplasmosis diagnosed?

Toxoplasmosis is typically diagnosed by blood tests. Eye disease is diagnosed based on the appearance of the lesions in the eye, symptoms, course of disease, and often blood tests.

How is toxoplasmosis treated?

- **Healthy (non-pregnant) people**
Most healthy people recover from toxoplasmosis without treatment. Persons who are ill can be treated with a combination of drugs.
- **Pregnant women, newborns, and infants**
Pregnant women, newborns, and infants can be treated, although the parasite is not eliminated completely.
- **Persons with ocular disease**
Persons with ocular toxoplasmosis are sometimes prescribed medicine to treat active disease by their eye doctor.
- **Persons with compromised immune systems**
Persons with compromised immune systems need to be treated until they have improvement in their condition. AIDS patients may need to continue medication for the rest of their lives or

for as long as they are immunosuppressed.

How can toxoplasmosis be prevented?

- Cook food to safe temperatures.
- Peel or wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, counters, utensils, and hands with hot soapy water after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, or unwashed fruits or vegetables.
- Avoid drinking untreated drinking water.
- Wear gloves when gardening and during any contact with soil or sand.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water after gardening, contact with soil or sand and changing the litter box.
- Change the litter box daily if you own a cat. If you are pregnant or immunocompromised:
 - Avoid changing cat litter if possible. If unavoidable, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands with soap and warm water afterwards.
 - Keep cats indoors.
 - Do not adopt or handle stray cats, especially kittens. Do not get a new cat while you are pregnant.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 801-538-6191

