

The best way to protect your unborn child is by protecting yourself against *Toxoplasma* exposure!

- Wash your hands with soap and water after any exposure to soil, sand, raw meat, or unwashed vegetables.
- Cook your meat completely (no pink should be seen and the juices should be clear). The internal temperature of the meat should reach 160°F. Do not sample meat until it is cooked.
- Freeze meat for several days before cooking to greatly reduce the chance of infection.
- Wash all cutting boards and knives thoroughly with hot soapy water after each use.
- Wash and/or peel all fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Wear gloves when gardening or handling sand from a sandbox. Wash hands well afterward.

There is no need to give up your cat if you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system. Follow these precautions:

- Have someone else change the litter box if possible. If you have to change it, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water afterwards.
- Change the litter box daily because the parasite doesn't become infectious until 1-5 days after it is shed in the feces.
- Feed your cat commercial dry or canned food. Never feed cats raw meat because this can be a source of *Toxoplasma* infection.
- Keep indoor cats indoors.
- Avoid stray cats, especially kittens.
- Cover your outdoor sandboxes.
- Don't get a new cat while you are pregnant.



For more information about toxoplasmosis, contact your health care provider, veterinarian, or the Minnesota Department of Health at:

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Visit our Web site at: www.health.state.mn.us
and the CDC Web site at: www.cdc.gov

*This brochure was funded by the
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

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Printed on recycled paper.



IC# 141-1220
11/02

Toxoplasmosis: An Important Message



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What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis (Tox-o-plaz-mo-sis) is a disease caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. This disease is more likely to be serious in pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems. Most people never know that they have toxoplasmosis because they never have any symptoms.

How can it affect me?

If you have a weakened immune system from HIV/AIDS, chemotherapy or immunosuppressive therapy, you are more likely to develop serious complications of toxoplasmosis. Symptoms in people with a weakened immune system are often caused by reactivation of a past *Toxoplasma* infection. Symptoms may include headache and fever. More serious complications may involve the brain, heart, and lungs.

How can it affect my unborn child?

If you are pregnant and become infected with the parasite, you can pass the infection to your unborn child even if you do not have any symptoms. The infant may be born with blindness or brain damage. The baby may appear normal at birth but could develop serious problems later in life, such as blindness or mental retardation.

How is toxoplasmosis spread?

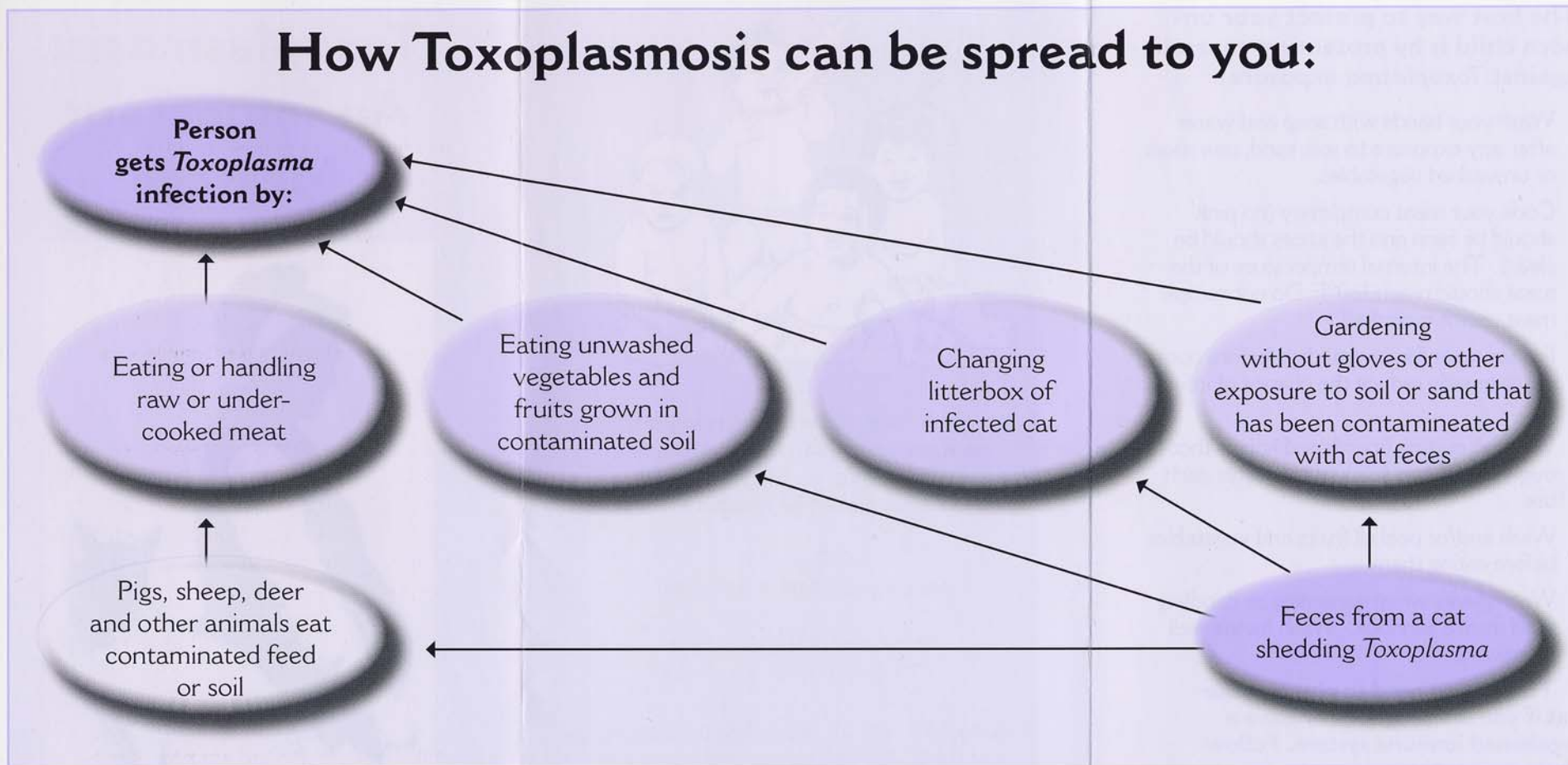
Cats play an important role in the spread of toxoplasmosis. They get the infection by eating infected rodents and then the parasite is passed in their feces. Kittens and young cats can shed millions of parasites in their feces for as long as three weeks after infection. Mature cats are less likely to shed *Toxoplasma*. Cats prefer litter boxes, garden soils and sand boxes for elimination. You may be exposed unintentionally by touching your mouth after changing a litter box, or while gardening without gloves. Fruits and vegetables can be contaminated with soil, and you can be infected by eating them if they are not washed or peeled.

Food animals such as pigs, sheep and deer become infected with *Toxoplasma* by eating feeds contaminated with the feces of cats. The parasite forms cysts in the muscle of food animals. People can be infected by handling raw meat that contains the cysts and not washing their hands afterward, or by eating under-cooked meat.

How do I know if I have been infected?

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

How Toxoplasmosis can be spread to you:



When should I be concerned?

Generally if a woman has been infected with *Toxoplasma* before becoming pregnant, the infant will be protected because the mother is immune. Some experts suggest waiting for 6 months after a recent infection to become pregnant.

If a woman has not been infected with *Toxoplasma* before pregnancy, the infant could be at risk because an infection occurring during pregnancy may be passed to the infant. See your health care provider if you have questions about *Toxoplasma* and pregnancy.

Is treatment available?

Women who become infected during pregnancy can be treated with medications. Mother and baby should be followed closely during the pregnancy and after the baby is born.

Patients with a weakened immune system and who have had a past *Toxoplasma* infection, may be given antibiotics to prevent reactivation of the infection.

See your health care provider if you have questions about toxoplasmosis.