



How can I protect my animals?

Most adult dogs and cats do not show symptoms of *T. gondii* infection. However, congenital infection may be seen in puppies and kittens, with symptoms of lethargy, fever, and neurologic signs. Follow these precautions to prevent your animals from being infected:

- Keep cats indoors to prevent them from eating wild rodents or birds and to keep them from spreading the parasite to the environment if they are already infected.
- Feed your pets and all of your animals commercially prepared foods.
- Do not feed your pets raw or undercooked meats, or unpasteurized milk.
- Clean litterboxes at least once a day.

If you suspect you may have been exposed to *T. gondii*, contact your healthcare provider. If you suspect your animal may have been exposed to *T. gondii*, contact your veterinarian.



Please **schedule** an **appointment** with your veterinarian to discuss any questions or concerns!



<http://phc.amedd.army.mil>

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APHC Animal Health

This information brochure was written by Army Veterinary Services personnel and published by the Army Public Health Center to inform and educate Service members, beneficiaries, and retirees about Animal Health. Comments or questions regarding content can be directed to ARMY-VSPublications@mail.mil. Locate your local Veterinary Treatment Facility at <https://tiny.army.mil/r/JG66r/VTFs>



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Zoonotic Disease

Toxoplasmosis

know the facts



Understanding Toxoplasmosis.

Your Veterinary Treatment Facility can help!



Army Public Health Center Animal Health

What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a common parasitic disease found throughout the world in nearly all mammals, including pets and humans. The disease is caused by a microscopic protozoal parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii* (tox-oh-plasma gon-dee-eye), also referred to as *T. gondii*.

T. gondii infection is a leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States and infects over a million people annually. The greatest risk of infection is to pregnant women and individuals with weakened immune systems.

How is toxoplasmosis spread?

The parasite that causes toxoplasmosis has a complex life cycle that affects many mammals. It requires a cat host to disseminate its eggs throughout the environment. Once in the environment, *T. gondii* eggs can survive for months, even in harsh conditions. These eggs can then be ingested by other mammals through soil-contaminated food or through grazing. Cats may also become infected by eating smaller infected mammals. The parasite can also be transmitted during pregnancy from a mother to her unborn babies, in both humans and animals.

People can become infected with *T. gondii* by eating contaminated raw vegetables or undercooked meat. It can also be spread through contact with the feces from an infected cat that is shedding the eggs. In the United States, people are much more likely to become infected through eating raw or undercooked meat, unwashed fruits and vegetables, or drinking unpasteurized milk, than from handling cat feces.

What are my chances of being infected?

Owning a cat does not mean you will be infected with the disease. Cats that do not hunt prey, are not fed raw or undercooked meat, and do not drink unpasteurized milk are not likely to be infected with *T. gondii*. You cannot be exposed to the parasite by touching an infected cat or through cat bites or scratches. Because infected cats only shed the parasite for a few days in their entire life, the chances of you being exposed to toxoplasmosis from an infected cat are small.

What are the symptoms of toxoplasmosis in humans?

Most people who are infected with *T. Gondii* never develop any symptoms. For those who do develop symptoms, they may include:

- mild, flu-like signs
- fever
- malaise
- swollen lymph nodes

A small percentage of those who are infected may develop symptoms of a foodborne illness (nausea, diarrhea, fever).

Rarely, more serious symptoms may include:

- eye disease with loss of sight
- infection of the brain
- possible death, if left untreated

Infection during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or severe disease in the newborn.

How can I protect myself?

You can reduce your risk of infection by following good hygiene practices and proper food safety precautions. For example:

- Wash your hands often, especially before and after eating, after contact with any animal, and after using the restroom.
- Ensure the meat you eat is cooked to a proper internal temperature, and avoid eating raw and undercooked meats.
- Thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables before cooking or eating.
- Wash items that contact meat or meat juices in hot, soapy water, and do not use the same items to prepare meats that you use to prepare other foods.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk, and do not give it to cats.
- Boil and filter any water from the environment when enjoying the outdoors.

If you suspect your animal may have been exposed to *T. gondii*, contact your veterinarian.

- Wear gloves while gardening and when changing the litterbox. Wash hands with soap and warm water immediately after gardening or cleaning the litterbox.
- Clean your cat's litterbox at least once a day to significantly reduce the likelihood of being exposed to *T. gondii*. *T. gondii* eggs become infectious only after being exposed to air and moisture for 1 to 5 days.
- Disinfect the litterbox weekly with soapy boiling water.
- **Pregnant women and immune-compromised individuals should avoid cleaning cat litterboxes, if at all possible.**
- Keep children's sandboxes covered, and do not allow cats to use them as a litterbox.
- Control rodent populations in and around the home.
- Keep cats indoors.

Wash your hands often, especially before and after eating, after contact with any animal, and after using the restroom.

