

# ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

## What is Toxoplasmosis?

According to the Center for Disease Control, toxoplasmosis is a single celled parasite and is considered to be the leading cause of death attributed to food borne illness in the United States.

All warm blooded mammals, including humans, may become infected. Felines are the only mammals where the organism is able to complete its life cycle. The organism is shed into the environment through feces for 1 to 2 weeks. Once in the environment, toxoplasmosis can live in soil of a warm, humid climate for a year. In the environment, other mammals may become infected.

Infection usually occurs when the organism is directly ingested. Other means of infection include eating raw or undercooked meat and contact with cat feces. It is possible for a mother to transmit toxoplasmosis to her fetus.

Healthy humans and cats rarely show signs of infection. Immunosuppressed humans may experience fever, flu-like symptoms, sore throat and head/muscle ache. If a mother transmits toxoplasmosis to her unborn child, the child may have neurologic issues.

Tips for prevention...

- Do not eat undercooked or raw meat • Microwaves do not heat evenly & will not reliably kill the organism
- Wash everything raw meat touches with warm, soapy water • Freezing does not kill the organism in meat or soil
- Wash vegetables before eating them • Wear gloves when working in the garden and cleaning the litter box
- Clean the litter box daily. It is recommended to clean the litter box twice a day • It takes 24 hours for humans to become infected
- Dispose of litter away from human and feline exposure • Do not allow cats to hunt or eat raw diets
- Do not drink raw milk • Pregnant women should not clean the litter box
- If a pregnant woman must clean the litter box, wear double gloves and a mask

The stool is the source of infection, not the cat. If you have any questions or concerns call your veterinarian.

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