

Toxoplasmosis

Caused by the *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite protozoan, toxoplasmosis is one of the most widespread zoonotic pathogens that can infect any warm-blooded animal, including humans. In most cases, the infection does not lead to illness, as our bodies usually produce a strong immunity at the first exposure/infection. Those who need to be careful are people with a weakened immune system, like pregnant women. Toxoplasmosis can cause problems when a woman is infected for the first time, before her body has developed immunity to the parasite, while she is pregnant. These include:

- Swollen lymph glands
- Muscle aches
- Pain
- Eye damage (severe toxoplasmosis)

How Cats Play a Role

Cats are “definitive hosts” of the parasite, meaning that they are the only species of animal that sheds the parasite eggs in their stool. They typically shed a very small number of eggs, and only at the first infection, but if reinfection occurs, the number of eggs is even smaller. Cats typically will not show signs of being sick, as their bodies also produce immunity at the first infection.

How to Protect Yourself if You’re Pregnant

If you’re pregnant, the following tips will help protect you and your baby from toxoplasmosis:

- Try to avoid contact with the litter box; have someone else clean it for you.
- If you do clean the box, wear gloves and wash your hands after cleaning the box.
- Cleaning the box daily, as the eggs take about 24 hours to become infective, once passed in your cat’s stool.
- Keep your cat indoors.

Remember, if you are pregnant and have had a cat before, you more than likely have been exposed to toxoplasmosis, and your body has an immunity to the infection. Use these tips as helpful guidelines to keep you and your baby safe.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to call us at 816-220-0222.

References:

Anderson, Maureen. *Toxoplasmosis—Why Your Cat Shouldn't Get the Blame or the Boot*. June 9, 2008. www.wormsandgermsblog.com. Accessed August 10, 2016.

Parasites – Toxoplasmosis (Toxoplasma infection): Toxoplasmosis Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Last reviewed: January 10, 2013.

http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/gen_info/faqs.html. Retrieved August 11, 2016.