

Toxoplasmosis

Fact Sheet

What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a common disease found in birds and mammals that is caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. The disease spreads from animals to humans. Cats are the most common source of the infection, by spreading the infection to other animals or people.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who are infected do not show any symptoms. Those who do get sick with a mild form of the illness will usually have flu-like symptoms including fever, sore throat, sore muscles, tiredness and swollen lymph nodes. In some cases, the infection can also cause vision problems. Immunocompromised people (such as those living with HIV/AIDS or cancer), transplant patients receiving immunosuppressive drugs, and pregnant women are more at risk of serious illness.

What causes it?

A person can become infected by eating raw or undercooked meat (pork or mutton, more rarely beef), drinking unpasteurized (raw) milk, by eating food or drinking water contaminated with cat feces, or by working with cat litter. Person to person transmission occurs only from a mother to her unborn child. The risk of the unborn child being affected and the severity of the disease depend on when the mother acquires the infection during pregnancy. Although very rare, a person can become ill by receiving an infected organ transplant or blood transfusion.

How is it treated?

Toxoplasmosis is treated primarily with antibacterial and anti-parasitic drugs for about four weeks; however, most people will recover from toxoplasmosis without treatment.

How can it be prevented?

Toxoplasmosis is easily prevented by practicing good hand hygiene, following good food safety practices, and by wearing gloves when working in the garden or cleaning cat litter pans. Pregnant women should avoid cleaning cat litter pans.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

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