

Parasites – Toxoplasmosis (Toxoplasma infection)

Toxoplasmosis: Pregnancy FAQs

When
should
I be

On This Page

- [When should I be concerned about toxoplasmosis?](#)
- [How do I know if I have been infected with *Toxoplasma*?](#)
- [How can *Toxoplasma* affect my unborn child?](#)
- [How is toxoplasmosis spread?](#)
- [Do I have to give up my cat if I'm pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant?](#)
- [Is there treatment available for toxoplasmosis?](#)
- [What are the best ways to protect myself or my unborn child against toxoplasmosis?](#)
- [Should a woman breastfeed her infant if she had contracted a *Toxoplasma* infection during her pregnancy?](#)

concerned about toxoplasmosis?

Generally, if you were infected with *Toxoplasma* before becoming pregnant your unborn child is protected by your immunity. Some experts suggest waiting for 6 months after a recent infection to become pregnant.

How do I know if I have been infected with *Toxoplasma*?

Your health care provider may suggest one or more varieties of blood tests to check for antibodies to *Toxoplasma*.

How can *Toxoplasma* affect my unborn child?

If you are newly infected with *Toxoplasma* while you are pregnant, or just before pregnancy, then you can pass the infection on to your baby. You may not have any symptoms from the infection. Most infected infants do not have symptoms at birth but can develop serious symptoms later in life, such as blindness or mental disability. Occasionally, infected newborns have serious eye or brain damage at birth.

How is toxoplasmosis spread?

Cats play an important role in the spread of toxoplasmosis. They become infected by eating infected rodents, birds, or other small animals. The parasite is then passed in the cat's feces. Kittens and cats can shed millions of parasites in their feces for as long as 3 weeks after infection. Mature cats are less likely to shed *Toxoplasma* if they have been previously infected. Cats and kittens prefer litter boxes, garden soils, and sandboxes for elimination, and you may be exposed unintentionally by touching your mouth after changing a litter box, or after gardening without gloves. Fruits and vegetables may have contact with contaminated soil or water also, and you can be infected by eating fruits and vegetables if they are not cooked, washed, or peeled.

Do I have to give up my cat if I'm pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant?



No. You should follow these helpful tips to reduce your risk of environmental exposure to *Toxoplasma*:

- Avoid changing cat litter if possible. If no one else can perform the task, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands with soap and water afterwards.
- Ensure that the cat litter box is changed daily. The *Toxoplasma* parasite does not become infectious until 1 to 5 days after it is shed in a cat's feces.
- Feed your cat commercial dry or canned food, not raw or undercooked meats.
- Keep cats indoors.
- Avoid stray cats, especially kittens. Do not get a new cat while you are pregnant.
- Keep outdoor sandboxes covered.
- Wear gloves when gardening and during contact with soil or sand because it might be contaminated with cat feces that contain *Toxoplasma*. Wash hands with soap and water after gardening or contact with soil or sand.



Cats play an important role in the spread of toxoplasmosis.

More on: [Handwashing](#)

Is there treatment available for toxoplasmosis?

If you are infected during pregnancy, medication is available. You and your baby should be closely monitored during your pregnancy and after your baby is born.

What are the best ways to protect myself or my unborn child against toxoplasmosis?

Cat owners and women who are exposed to cats should follow these tips to reduce exposure to *Toxoplasma*.

- Avoid changing cat litter if possible. If no one else can perform the task, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands with soap and water afterwards.
- Ensure that the cat litter box is changed daily. The *Toxoplasma* parasite does not become infectious until 1 to 5 days after it is shed in a cat's feces.
- Feed your cat commercial dry or canned food, not raw or undercooked meats.
- Keep cats indoors.
- Avoid stray cats, especially kittens. Do not get a new cat while you are pregnant.
- Keep outdoor sandboxes covered.
- Wear gloves when gardening and during contact with soil or sand because it might be contaminated with cat feces that contain *Toxoplasma*. Wash hands with soap and water after gardening or contact with soil or sand.

More on: [Handwashing](#)

You should also:

Cook food to safe temperatures. A food thermometer should be used to measure the internal temperature of cooked meat. Color is not a reliable indicator that meat has been cooked to a temperature high enough to kill harmful pathogens like *Toxoplasma*. Do not sample meat until it is cooked. USDA recommends the following for meat preparation:

For Whole Cuts of Meat (excluding poultry)

Cook to at least 145° F (63° C) as measured with a food thermometer placed in the thickest part of the meat, then allow the meat to rest for three minutes before carving or consuming. *According to USDA, "A 'rest time' is the amount of time the product remains at the final temperature, after it has been removed from a grill, oven, or other heat source. During the three minutes after meat is removed from the heat source, its temperature remains constant or continues to rise, which destroys pathogens."

For Ground Meat (excluding poultry)

Cook to at least 160° F (71° C); ground meats do not require a rest time.

For All Poultry (whole cuts and ground)

Cook to at least 165° F (74° C). The internal temperature should be checked in the innermost part of the thigh, innermost part of the wing, and the thickest part of the breast. Poultry do not require a rest time.

More on safe food handling: [Fight BAC: Safe Food Handling](#) 

- Freeze meat for several days at sub-zero (below 0° F) temperatures before cooking to greatly reduce chance of infection. *Freezing does not reliably kill other parasites that may be found in meat (like certain species of *Trichinella*) or harmful bacteria. Cooking meat to USDA recommended internal temperatures is the safest method to destroy all parasites and other pathogens.
- Peel or wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, counters, utensils, and hands with soapy water after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, or unwashed fruits or vegetables.
- Avoid drinking untreated water.
- Do not drink unpasteurized goat's milk.
- Do not eat raw or undercooked oysters, mussels, or clams (these may be contaminated with *Toxoplasma* that has washed into seawater).

Should a woman breastfeed her infant if she had contracted a *Toxoplasma* infection during her pregnancy?

Yes. Among healthy women, the possibility of breast milk transmission of *Toxoplasma* infection is not likely.

While *Toxoplasma* infection has been associated with infants who consumed unpasteurized goat's milk, there are no studies documenting breast milk transmission of *Toxoplasma gondii* in humans. In the event that a nursing woman experiences cracked and bleeding nipples or breast inflammation within several weeks immediately following an acute *Toxoplasma* infection (when the organism is still circulating in her bloodstream), it is theoretically possible that she could transmit *Toxoplasma gondii* to the infant through her breast milk. Immune suppressed women could have circulating *Toxoplasma* for even longer periods of time. However, the likelihood of human milk transmission is very small.



[Back To Top](#)