



***Toxoplasma* Infection** **Toxoplasmosis (TOX-o-plaz-MO-sis)**

What is toxoplasmosis?

A single-celled parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii* causes a disease known as toxoplasmosis. While the parasite is found throughout the world, more than 60 million people in the United States may be infected with the *Toxoplasma* parasite. Of those who are infected, very few have symptoms because a healthy person's immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness. However, pregnant women and

HIV/AIDS, those taking certain types of chemotherapy, and those who have recently received an organ transplant.

What should I do if I think I am at risk for severe toxoplasmosis?

If you are planning to become pregnant, your health care provider may test you for *Toxoplasma*. If the test is positive it means you have already been infected sometime in your life. There usually is little need to worry about passing the infection to your baby. If the test is negative, take necessary precautions to avoid infection (See below).

If you are already pregnant, you and your health care provider should discuss your risk for toxoplasmosis. Your health care provider may order a blood sample for testing.

If you have a weakened immune system, ask your doctor about having your blood tested for *Toxoplasma*. If your test is positive, your doctor can tell you if and when you need to take medicine to prevent the infection from reactivating. If your test is negative, it means you have never been infected and you need to take precautions to avoid infection. (See below).

What should I do if I think I may have toxoplasmosis?

If you suspect that you may have toxoplasmosis, talk to your health care provider. Your provider may order one or more varieties of blood tests specific for toxoplasmosis. The results from the different tests can help your provider determine if you have a *Toxoplasma* infection and whether it is a recent (acute) infection.

What is the treatment for toxoplasmosis?

Once a diagnosis of toxoplasmosis is confirmed, you and your health care provider can discuss whether treatment is necessary. In an otherwise healthy person who is not pregnant, treatment usually is not needed. If symptoms occur, they typically go away within a few weeks to months. For pregnant women or persons who have weakened immune systems, medications are available to treat toxoplasmosis.

How can I prevent toxoplasmosis?

There are several general sanitation and food safety steps you can take to reduce your chances of becoming infected with *Toxoplasma*.

- Wear gloves when you garden or do anything outdoors that involves handling soil. Cats, which may pass the parasite in their feces, often use gardens and sandboxes as litter boxes. Wash your hands well with soap and water after outdoor activities, especially before you eat or prepare any food.
- When preparing raw meat, wash any cutting boards, sinks, knives, and other utensils that might have touched the raw meat thoroughly with soap and hot water to avoid cross-contaminating other foods. Wash your hands well with soap and water after handling raw meat.
- Cook all meat thoroughly; that is, to an internal temperature of 160° F and until it is no longer pink in the center or until the juices become colorless. Do not taste meat before it is fully cooked.

For further information on safe food handling to help reduce food borne illness visit the Fight BAC!® Web site at <http://www.fightbac.org/main.cfm>.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

