

POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES

Indiana Proactive Animal Welfare, Inc.
P.O. Box 729
Carmel, Indiana 46082
(317) 345-6773
www.indiana-paw.com



Your Pregnancy & Cats: Toxoplasmosis Facts & Myths

If you're pregnant, you've probably heard of toxoplasmosis, which is a rare disease that can cause birth defects. The parasite that causes toxoplasmosis may be found in a variety of substances, including everything from undercooked meat to the feces of cats who've ingested birds, mice or contaminated soil. Sadly, myths and misinformation cause many pregnant women to give up their cats, erroneously believing they will contract toxoplasmosis if they have a cat in the house. The truth is that toxoplasmosis is rarely transmitted from cats to their owners, and any small risk that does exist can be virtually eliminated with the use of simple common sense and good hygiene. U.S. health officials report that people are far more likely to contract toxoplasmosis from eating improperly prepared meat than they are from their family cat! In short, getting rid of the family cat is not necessary to protect oneself against toxoplasmosis.

Background On Toxoplasmosis

The Basics About Toxoplasmosis



- Toxoplasmosis is a rare disease that can cause birth defects.
- The parasite that causes toxoplasmosis may be found in a variety of substances, including:
 - Uncooked or undercooked meat;
 - Outdoor soil; and
 - Feces from cats who've ingested raw meat, birds, mice or contaminated soil.
- However, it's difficult and extremely rare for cats to transmit toxoplasmosis to their human caretakers, and pregnant women are unlikely to contract the disease from their cat.
 - In order to contract toxoplasmosis, a woman would have to make contact with contaminated feces in the litter box and then touch her mouth without washing her hands, or otherwise transmit the feces into her digestive system.
 - U.S. health officials report that people are more likely to contract toxoplasmosis from eating improperly prepared meat than they are from their family cat!
- Women need not give up their cats or put their cats outdoors to reduce their risk for toxoplasmosis. Instead, they need to simply use common sense and good hygiene practices, as explained below.

You Don't Have To Give Up Your Cat!

You're Highly Unlikely To Get Toxoplasmosis From Your Cat

- Being pregnant does NOT mean you have to give up living with and caring for your cat.

- Pregnant women are unlikely to contract toxoplasmosis from their cat. And any small risk that does exist in connection with cat feces can be virtually eliminated by using common sense and the hygienic practices described below.

Simple Steps To Avoid Exposure

- By taking the following simple steps, you can reduce your risk of contracting toxoplasmosis:
 - Avoid handling or eating uncooked meat.
 - Wash all uncooked vegetables thoroughly.
 - Wear gloves when you're working in outdoor soil.
 - Keep your cat safely indoors and away from wildlife.
 - Feed your cat only commercially-prepared cat food.
 - If possible, have a friend or family member clean your cat's litter box daily during your pregnancy. If you must clean the litter box yourself, wear rubber gloves and thoroughly wash your hands afterwards.
 - Remove feces every time you change your cat's litter – any contaminated fecal matter is not contagious for the first 24 hours.
- If you still feel concern, ask your veterinarian to run a simple blood test on your cat to confirm that your cat does not have toxoplasmosis. You may also ask your obstetrician to run a blood test to confirm that you don't have toxoplasmosis.

Parting Thoughts

- You do NOT have to get rid of your cat to protect yourself against toxoplasmosis.
- The risk of contracting toxoplasmosis from your cat is extremely low, and any small risk can be virtually eliminated if you follow the recommendations above.
- If you use common sense and good hygiene, your cat can continue to be a beloved member of the family, long after your baby arrives!

Suggested Reading

- The Humane Society of the United States, "Pregnancy And Toxoplasmosis," http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/pregnancy_and_toxoplasmosis.html
- The Humane Society of the United States, "Our Prescription For Toxoplasmosis: Learn The Facts And Keep Your Family Together," http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/our_prescription_for_toxoplasmosis_learn_the_facts_and_keep_your_family_together.html

Important Note: Indiana-PAW's POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES is intended to provide quick tips to help citizens address common pet health and behavior questions. It is not intended to replace consultation with one's veterinarian and/or a trained behavior specialist.