Stanhope Park
Veterinary Hospital

TOXOPLASMOSIS

Toxoplasmosis is caused by the protozoan parasite **Toxoplasma gondii**. Cats are the natural hosts of T. gondii, with other species serving only as intermediate hosts. Toxoplasma infection is common in cats but rarely causes clinical disease. Most cats are infected by eating intermediate hosts such as rodents which are infected with T. gondii tissue cysts.

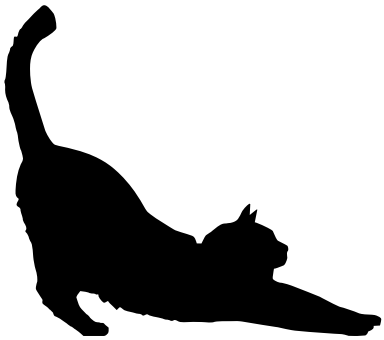
When a cat becomes infected with T. gondii, they may shed oocysts in their faeces which is when they may pose a risk for humans. However, cats only shed oocysts once in their lifetime, usually only for 3-10 days after ingestion of tissue cysts, so if your cat is known to have antibodies to T. gondii then they will no longer shed oocysts and do not pose a risk to humans, as these antibodies take 2-3 weeks to develop following infection *(i.e. once shedding has ceased*). Blood tests can be performed to detect these antibodies in your cat, with a positive result meaning the cat will **NOT** shed oocysts.

HUMAN INFECTION

People who have been infected with T. gondii develop antibodies to the organism which protect from further infection, and can be detected in a blood test. Women who develop toxoplasmosis for the first time during pregnancy, are at risk of transmitting the disease to their unborn baby, which can result in birth defects and abortion. If a woman has been infected with T. gondii before becoming pregnant, she will have developed antibodies, and there is **NO RISK** of infection to her unborn baby.

By far the most common route of infection to people is by either ingestion of oocysts from the environment such as contaminated soil or contaminated fruit and veg, or by ingestion of meat containing tissue cysts. Less common routes of human infection include drinking contaminated water and ingestion of unpasteurised goat's milk.

Research indicates that contact with cats does not increase risk of T. gondii infection in people, with veterinary professionals working with cats, no more likely to be infected than people not in contact with cats. Thus the risk of infection from cats is very low except in young children playing in contaminated soil or sand pits, with most people infected through ingestion of undercooked meat, especially goat, mutton and pork.



If you have any questions about your pets, call us on 01325 620968 or ask a member of our team

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REDUCING RISK OF TRANSMISSION

- Pregnant or immunocompromised people should avoid contact with cat litter trays
- Empty litter trays daily so that oocysts do not have time to become infective within the litter tray
- Wear gloves when handling cat litter and wash hands thoroughly afterwards
- Periodically clean litter trays with detergent and scalding water, leaving the tray to soak for 5-10 minutes
- Dispose of cat litter safely into sealed plastic bags
- Cover children's sandpits when not in use to prevent cats from toileting in them
- Feed your cat only commercial cat food or properly cooked food to avoid infection
- Wash hands after contact with cats, especially before eating
- If very concerned, ask your vet to perform a blood test to check your cat's antibody titre to T. gondii
- Prevent hunting behaviour and access to rodents to reduce infection to your cat

REDUCING RISK FROM OTHER SOURCES

- Wear gloves when gardening and wash hands thoroughly after contact with soil
- Wear gloves when handling food and/or wash hands thoroughly afterwards
- Wash fruit and veg thoroughly before consuming
- Wash down food preparation surfaces and utensils after use
- Cook meat thoroughly to kill tissue cysts - microwaving is not a safe way to kill tissue cysts as heating is uneven
- Freezing meat at -12°C to -20°C for 3 days kills tissue cysts
- If drinking a non-mains water supply, boil or filter before drinking

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