

# Toxoplasmosis

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Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. The parasite is found in all parts of the world.

Toxoplasmosis is rarely serious in healthy children or adults. Most people have no symptoms when infected with *Toxoplasma gondii*, but a minority will experience a flu-like illness, sometimes with swollen neck glands. It can, however, cause serious disease if a person's immune system is weakened by conditions such as cancer.

## How it spreads

People may become infected through:

- eating raw or undercooked meat
- contact with environments contaminated by cat faeces (poo), such as cat litter boxes or soil
- eating raw food (vegetables or salad) or drinking water contaminated with cat faeces.

## Exclusion period

Not excluded – people with toxoplasmosis can attend the service.

## Risks in pregnancy

If you are infected with *Toxoplasma gondii* during pregnancy, it may pass to your baby through the bloodstream. It can cause birth defects in the unborn child, especially if infection occurs in the first half of pregnancy.

If you are pregnant and have been exposed to toxoplasmosis, see your doctor to check if you are immune, or if you need treatment.

If you are pregnant, **avoid:**

- cleaning cat litter trays
- eating raw or undercooked meat
- drinking untreated water
- contact with soil (for example, gardening; or wash hands thoroughly after gardening or spending time outdoors)
- eating raw fruit or vegetables without thoroughly washing and peeling beforehand.

For more information, see [pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/toxoplasmosis](http://pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/toxoplasmosis).

## Actions for educators and other staff

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Cover sandpits when they are not in use.

## Actions for parents and carers

Make sure your child washes their hands thoroughly and often, especially after playing outdoors or after touching pet cats.

Wash your hands thoroughly before and after meals and after handling raw meat. Wash knives and other kitchen utensils thoroughly after they have been in contact with raw meat.

Cook meat well, and wash raw fruit and vegetables carefully before eating.

Dispose of cat droppings and dirty litter daily, because it can become infectious after 24 hours. Wash your hands thoroughly after disposing of litter. If you are pregnant, get someone else to clean out your cat's litter tray.

Cover your children's sandpit when they are not playing in it to stop animal droppings getting in.

## More information about toxoplasmosis

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of toxoplasmosis ([healthdirect.gov.au/toxoplasmosis](http://healthdirect.gov.au/toxoplasmosis)).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker ([healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker](http://healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker))
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.