

Toxoplasmosis

What is Toxoplasmosis ?

- Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a single-celled parasite called **Toxoplasma gondii**.
- Toxoplasma infection could cause serious health problems in unborn babies and individuals who have weak immune systems.



A *Toxoplasma*-positive reaction, stained by immunofluorescence (IFA). (CDC Photo)

How is *Toxoplasma* transmitted?

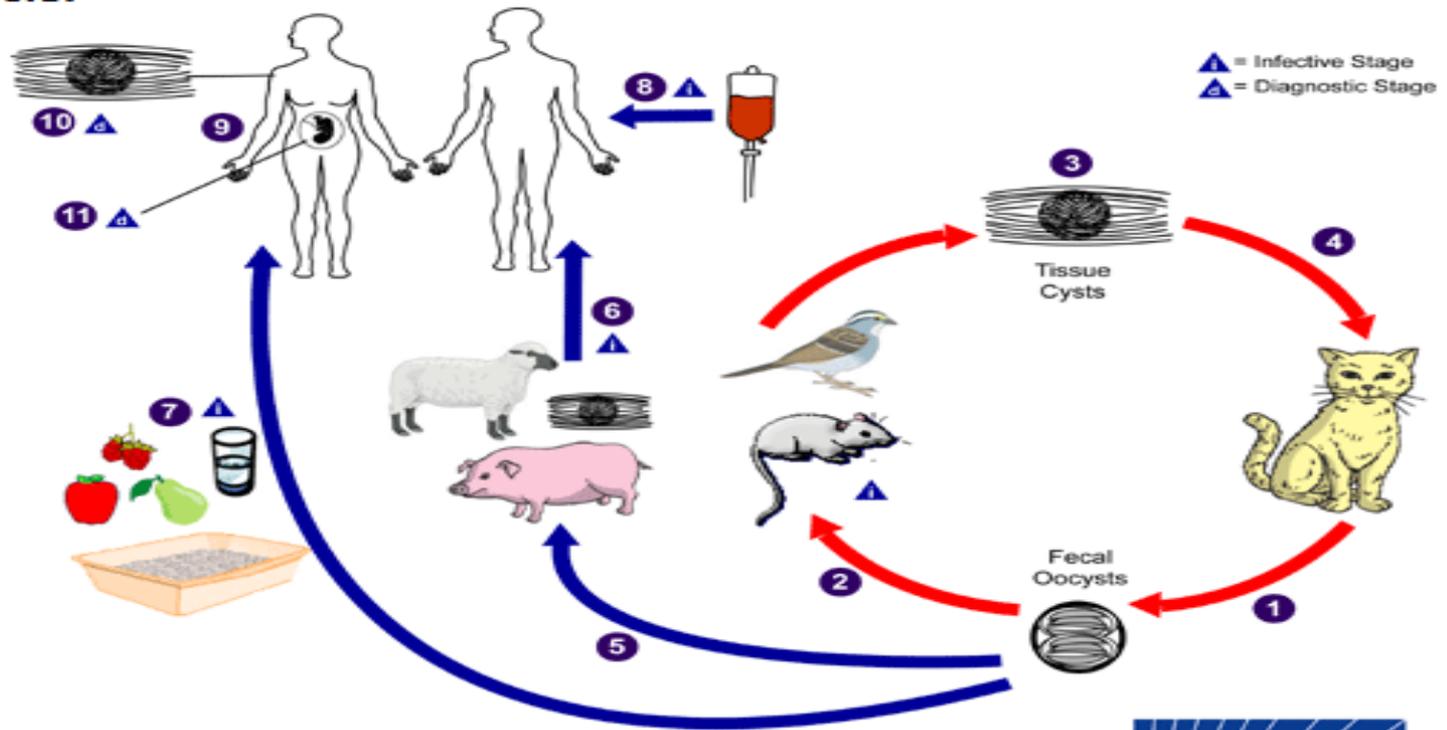


- Foodborn
 - Eating undercooked, contaminated meat especially pork, lamb, and venison, with *Toxoplasma gondii*.
 - Drinking water contaminated with *Toxoplasma gondii*.
- Animal-to-human
 - Cats become infected by eating infected rodents, birds, or other small animals.
 - The parasite is passed to human from the cat's feces.
- Mother-to-child
 - Woman who is newly infected with *Toxoplasma* during pregnancy can pass the infection to her unborn child.



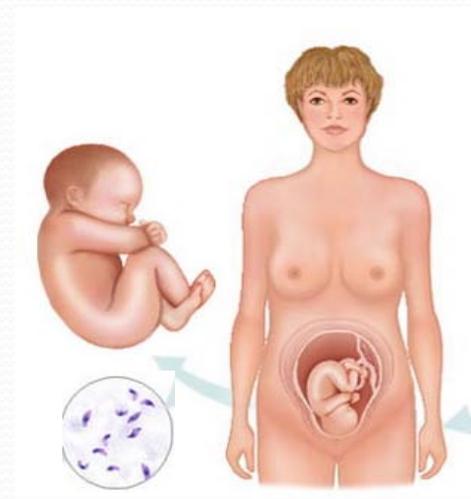
Infection Routes of Toxoplasma

Life Cycle:



Who is susceptible to toxoplasmosis?

- Anyone can get toxoplasmosis but those at greater risk of developing serious illness include:
 - People who have weakened immune systems such as patients with cancer or AIDS
 - Unborn babies



What are the symptoms of toxoplasmosis?

Symptoms usually take between 5-23 days to appear after infection.

- Most healthy people who have *Toxoplasma gondii* often do not have symptoms because their immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness.
- Mild with flu-like symptoms that last for several weeks and then go away.
 - Tender lymph nodes
 - Muscle aches



What serious symptoms result from toxoplasmosis?

Mother-to-child

- If a pregnant woman becomes newly infected with *Toxoplasma*, she can pass the infection to her unborn baby.
- Serious health problems result in unborn baby.
 - Stillborn child
 - Abnormal enlargement or smallness of the head
 - Potential vision loss
 - Mental disability
 - Seizures
 - Eye lesions - eye pain, sensitivity to light, tearing of the eyes, blurred vision



What serious symptoms result from toxoplasmosis? (cont)

- Those with weak immune systems may experience severe symptoms if infected with *Toxoplasma*.
 - Fever
 - Confusion
 - Headache
 - Seizures
 - Nausea
 - Poor coordination





How is toxoplasmosis diagnosed?

- Blood test

What is the treatment for toxoplasmosis?

- Most cases of toxoplasmosis do not require treatment.
- In seriously ill patients or infected pregnant women, a combination of sulfa drugs and anti-parasitic drugs may be used.
- Persons with eye diseases are sometimes prescribed medicine to treat active disease by their eye doctor.



How can toxoplasmosis be prevented?

- Wash hands before preparing food and eating.
- Cook meat thoroughly and wash or peel fruits/vegetables prior to eating.
- Wash hands and utensils after contact with raw meat.
- Avoid eating raw eggs or drinking unpasteurized milk and contaminated water.
- Dispose of cat feces and litter daily before the *Toxoplasma* parasites have a chance to become infective.
- Unless they are known to have immunity to toxoplasmosis, pregnant women should avoid cleaning litter pans and avoid contact with cats that have an unknown feeding history.
- While outdoors one should wear gloves when gardening.
- Prevent cats from gaining access to sandboxes used by children; change sand if it is contaminated.

