

Cats & Toxoplasmosis Information Sheet

Toxoplasmosis Facts

“*Toxoplasma gondii* is common, worldwide and everywhere and affects a variety of mammals and birds” – Companion Animal Parasite Council

- Leading cause of toxoplasmosis in humans is through ingestion of undercooked meat. – CDC
- Direct contact with cats is not considered to be a risk factor for toxoplasma infection in people, particularly when cats are kept indoors and fed a commercial diet. – CAPC
- Toxoplasmosis is transmitted to humans from cats when humans accidentally swallow the parasite through contact with cat feces that contain *Toxoplasma*. – CDC
- Toxoplasmosis can be prevented if the following are done: clean the litterbox daily (the parasite takes 24 hours to become infective in cat feces), wash hands with soap and water after exposure to soil, sand, raw meat or unwashed vegetables, and ensure cats are kept indoors and eat only cat food. – CAPC
- Only about 1% of cats are active hosts of toxoplasmosis able to shed the parasite. – CAPC
- Infected cats shed for only about 1 to 3 weeks following infection. – CAPC
- Because cats only shed the organism for a few days in their entire life, the chance of human exposure is small. – CFHC
- Cats and dogs become infected with toxoplasma by ingestion of infected mammalian or avian tissues or ingestion of the parasite from articles contaminated by feline feces (e.g., soil, water, vegetation). – CAPC
- About 19% (~60 million) of the human population in the United States has already been exposed to (may be infected with) *Toxoplasma*. Of those who are infected, very few have symptoms because a healthy person's immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness. – CDC
- A 2013 study by VanWormer, et al. showed reduced prevalence of toxoplasmosis in cats who were fed and considered managed by humans as compared to wild felids and cats subsisting on wild prey.

Solutions to Consider

- Keep cats indoors and prevent them from hunting and consuming undercooked meat, encourage cat owners to scoop litterboxes daily.
- Support sterilization to reduce kitten births, since kittens and young cats are at greatest risk to become newly infected and shed the parasite.
- Advocate for wildlife officials, conservationists, animal welfare advocates and veterinarians to work together to solve problems using the latest science combined with humane methods.

Resources/ References

- Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) – www.capcvet.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – www.cdc.gov
- Cornell Feline Health Center (CFHC) – www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/
- VanWormer, E., P.A. Conrad, et al. (2013). “*Toxoplasma gondii*, Source to Sea: Higher Contribution of Domestic Felids to Terrestrial Parasite Loading Despite Lower Infection Prevalence.” *EcoHealth* **10**, 277-289