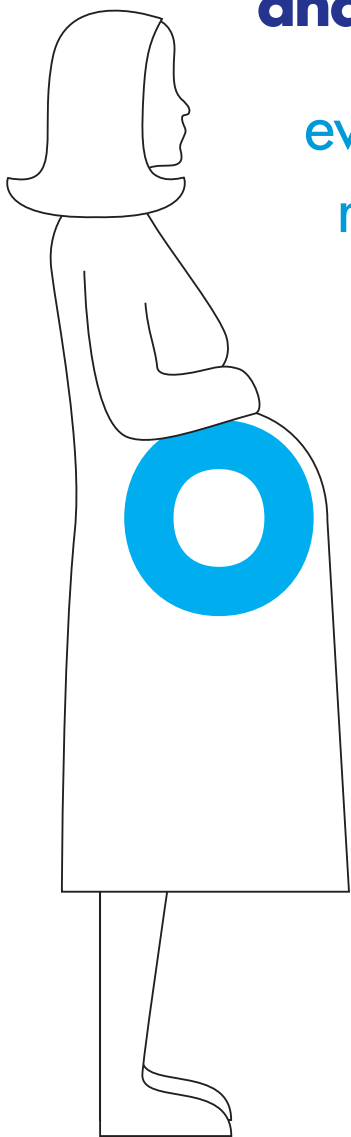


Toxoplasmosis and pregnancy

everything you
need to know



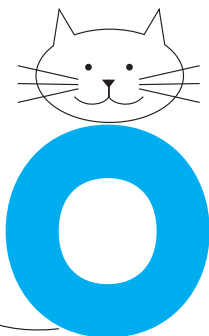
How to avoid catching toxoplasmosis

To reduce the risk of catching toxoplasmosis while you are pregnant follow the precautions below:

- only eat meat which has been thoroughly cooked all the way through
- avoid raw cured meat such as Parma ham
- wash hands, chopping boards and utensils thoroughly after preparing raw meat
- wash all fruit and vegetables thoroughly
- don't drink unpasteurised goats milk or eat dairy products made from it
- wear gloves when gardening and wash hands and gloves afterwards – if you eat while gardening, wash hands first
- cover children's sandpits to prevent cats messing in them
- remove faeces from cat litter tray every day wearing rubber gloves and wash gloves and hands after – or get someone else to do this

Cats are the only animals which can shed this parasite in their faeces. Provided precautions are taken, a healthy cat is not a particular risk to a pregnant woman.

Care of a sick cat should be left to someone else.



What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite.

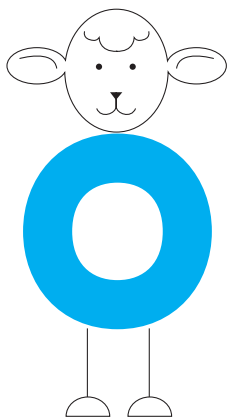
Who is at risk?

Anyone who eats anything infected with the parasite.
Some women may be at increased risk due to the job they do such as catering, working on the land or farming.
Lambing is a particular risk for pregnant women.

How is it caught?

It is caught from eating anything infected with the parasite.
This could be:

- raw or undercooked meat, including raw cured meat e.g. Parma ham, salami
- unwashed, uncooked vegetables and fruit
- cat faeces and soil contaminated with cat faeces
- unpasteurised goats milk and dairy products made from it (although this is a rare route of transmission)



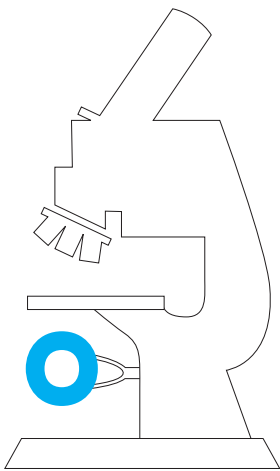
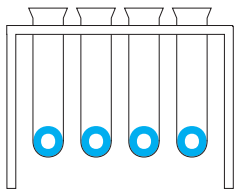
How would I know if I have got it?

Toxoplasmosis does not usually cause any problems and in most cases a person does not realise they have ever had it. It is not usually dangerous or serious but can cause mild 'flu-like symptoms or in severe cases an unpleasant illness similar to glandular fever.

- up to half the population of the UK will have the infection at some time in their lives
- it is generally accepted that once you have had toxoplasmosis you are immune for life
- a blood test can detect toxoplasmosis

Should I have a blood test for toxoplasmosis?

Following the precautions (overleaf) should protect you from infection. If you think that you may be at risk, a blood test can show if you currently have, or have ever had, toxoplasmosis. Some pregnant women will have had toxoplasmosis in the past, the risk to the baby is only from an infection caught for the first time during pregnancy, or within 2–3 months before conception. All positive blood tests should be referred to a specialist laboratory where experts will find out if infection is past or current.



Why is it a problem if caught during pregnancy?

Toxoplasmosis is one of the few infections which can pass from a mother to an unborn baby and cause damage.

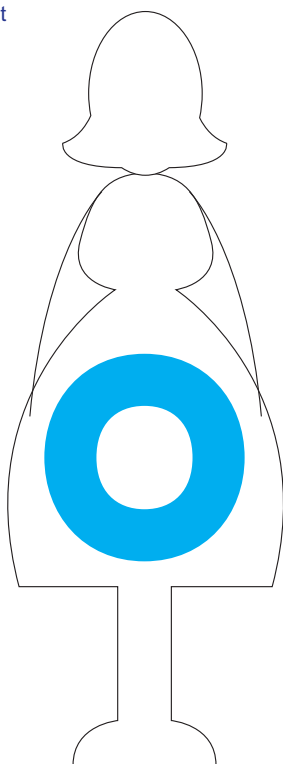
A baby may be:

- miscarried
- stillborn
- born with damage to the brain and other organs, particularly the eyes

However, most babies born with toxoplasmosis have no obvious damage at birth but develop symptoms, usually eye damage, during childhood or even adulthood.

What can be done if toxoplasmosis is caught during pregnancy?

A woman with a current infection in pregnancy needs expert care and counselling. She may be treated with an antibiotic which is thought to help prevent the baby becoming infected. An amniocentesis can be used to check if the baby is infected and scans may show if the baby has been damaged.



About Tommy's, the baby charity

Tommy's was set up in 1992 to make pregnancy and childbirth safer for both the expectant mother and her child by funding a national programme of medical research into prematurity, stillbirth and premature birth.

Every parent-to-be hopes that their baby will be born healthy but every year in the UK one in four women and their partners will experience the trauma of miscarriage and around 4,000 babies will be stillborn. More than 100 babies are born too small or too soon every day and two per cent are severely premature, arriving six weeks before their expected birthday. Prematurity is the commonest cause of baby death and one in 10 premature babies will develop a permanent disability.

Tommy's also provides information about pregnancy health issues for health professionals, parents and parents-to-be. We aim to ensure that information on health in pregnancy and reducing the risks of problems is available to all parents-to-be in the UK, thereby reducing the number of babies' lives lost.

To order further copies of this leaflet please contact Tommy's at the address below. You can order up to 10 copies free of charge but orders exceeding this carry a postage, packing and admin charge. Please use the Tommy's leaflet order form or contact Tommy's to discuss these charges (info@tommys.org)

For details of how you can make a donation to Tommy's, the baby charity, or to make an instant credit card donation call 020 7593 1150, visit our website at www.tommys.org, or send a cheque made payable to TOMMY'S THE BABY CHARITY to the address below.

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