

Cats and Pregnancy

The reason that pregnant women are advised not to clean the litter box is to prevent infection with toxoplasmosis, which can cause miscarriage or fetal malformations. According to the Center of Disease Control, people are more likely to get toxoplasmosis from undercooked meat or gardening than from their own pet cat.

Here is information about the life cycle of toxoplasma and cats.

Toxoplasma gondii is a protozoan organism that can affect all mammals. Once a cat or human has been infected once, he or she typically becomes immune and will likely not become reinfected. This means that a kitten is more likely to get toxoplasma than an older cat.

Toxoplasma is transmitted to the next animal that eats the tissue cyst (oocyst) in raw meat or in feces.

- Only cats who eat infected tissue cysts get infected: this means outdoor cats who hunt and eat rodents, or cats fed raw food.
- The cat only excretes infectious oocytes the first time he gets infected, and only for two weeks. Kittens who go outdoors are more likely to be infected than older cats who have been hunting outdoors for years.
- The oocyte becomes infectious after one to five days. Cleaning the litter box daily reduces the risk of contacting infectious organisms.
- Oocytes are transmitted by ingestion: a woman would have to clean the litter box and then touch her mouth without having washed her hands first.

To reduce your risk of getting toxoplasmosis:

- Ask someone else to clean the litter box
- Clean the litter box wearing gloves and make sure not to touch your mouth with the gloves
- Clean the litter box with great attention to washing your hands well before touching your mouth
- Do not pet stray cats.
- Do not get a new kitten or cat while you are pregnant.
- Feed your cats commercial cat food and do not let them outside.
- When gardening, use gloves or be very attentive to not placing your hands near your mouth before washing your hands well.
- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Do not eat raw or very rare meat.
- Keep your children's sandbox covered.

References:

http://m.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/toxoplasmosis.html#.U1O5_ShYd0i April 20, 2014

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/cats.htm> April 20, 2014

http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/gen_info/faqs.html April 20, 2014