

Risk of Toxoplasmosis from Game Meat



Toxoplasmosis is an illness caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. *Toxoplasma gondii* is spread by cats and can cause birth defects or miscarriages in pregnant women. However, toxoplasmosis can affect anyone. Most people with the parasite have a flu-like illness lasting a few weeks or don't get sick at all, but some people have long-term effects, like vision problems. For people with a weakened immune system, it can be deadly.

How do you get toxoplasmosis from game meat?



Infected outdoor and/or wild cats spread *Toxoplasma* cysts (parasites with protective shells) in their poop, and it gets into water and on plants.



Animals can get infected if they eat one of these cysts, and then more cysts form in their body, especially in the muscles.



If people eat undercooked game meat, they can eat these cysts and get toxoplasmosis.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Many people have no symptoms. Some people have these flu-like symptoms:

- ▶ Muscle aches
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Fever with chills and sweats
- ▶ Tiredness
- ▶ Swollen lymph nodes
- ▶ Sore throat

One study in Iowa* found that 1 out of every 2 white-tailed deer could make you sick if not fully cooked.



What are the treatment options?

Most cases do not need treatment, but in some cases a doctor will give you antibiotics.

How can I safely eat game meat?

- ▶ Cook all wild game meats to an internal temperature of at least 160°F. Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature.
- ▶ Don't rely on freezing, microwaving, curing (salting), smoking, or drying meat to make game meat safe to eat—some species of another parasite, *Trichinella*, can survive all of these methods.
- ▶ Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling raw meat.
- ▶ Wash all materials that come in contact with raw meat thoroughly with soap and water after use.

*J.P. Dubey, et al. Veterinary Parasitology, Volume 161, Issues 3-4, 2009, Pages 330-334

