

Pregnant Women and Cats

Find out what a vet recommends for pregnant women who own cats.

Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, D.V.M.

Q. If I'm pregnant, can I handle my cat?

Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, D.V.M., says: If you are planning a pregnancy, have yourself tested for the protozoal parasite toxoplasmosis first. If tests indicate previous exposure, there is no cause for concern. Toxoplasmosis is only a danger if an active infection occurs during pregnancy. If previously exposed, a woman will not develop a second infection. If you have not been exposed, doctors recommend that you avoid cleaning your cats litter box so that you reduce the risk of exposure to *Toxoplasma gondii*. An infection with this parasite during pregnancy can lead to abortion, stillbirth, or birth of a sick child. Cats become infected with toxoplasmosis if they eat raw meat or prey carrying the parasite. They rarely develop any clinical signs but are responsible for spreading the organism through their feces. Women actually have a greater risk of exposure to toxoplasmosis if they handle raw meat or garden without wearing gloves and do not wash their hands thoroughly afterward because they could be exposed to infected cat feces in the dirt. During your pregnancy, have another family member clean the litter box, make sure you wash your hands after handling your cat, and do not allow your cat to walk on counters or surfaces where food is prepared.

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