

Points on Pets: Toxoplasmosis can be prevented with proper hygiene practices

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Some of our well-meaning friends have scared us about the possibility that our three cats might cause our unborn baby to be abnormal because of a parasitic disease called toxoplasmosis. My physician has not mentioned this disease and has not even asked whether or not we have pets.

Are we worrying overtime? We dearly love our cats; however, we would never knowingly do anything that might cause risk to our unborn baby.

A: You are very wise to be concerned about your health, the health of your unborn baby and about any health risks created by your close contact with your three cats during your pregnancy. Although toxoplasmosis can be a serious health risk for your unborn baby, practicing simple, common sense hygienic practices while you are pregnant will eliminate any causes for concern.

Most cats with toxoplasmosis do not appear to be sick. However, infected carrier cats often shed a microscopic form of the causative parasite in their stools. Therefore, avoiding all contact with feces of cats is an effective means to prevent spread of toxoplasmosis to humans.

Another fortunate fact is that it takes about four to five days for the organisms causing toxoplasmosis to become infective for humans following defecation by the infected cat. Therefore, if the litter box is emptied at intervals of less than every three days, it is highly unlikely that infective organisms will ever develop. Because of the seriousness of toxoplasmosis in unborn babies, it is strongly recommended that pregnant women avoid all contact with cat feces. Your husband should accept the responsibility for emptying and refreshing the litter box while you are pregnant.

Infected cats are not the only source of toxoplasmosis for humans. Undercooked meat, including beef, pork and chicken can be the source of infection. People can also get toxoplasmosis by eating unwashed contaminated vegetables harvested from gardens in which cats defecate. All vegetables should be thoroughly washed before being eaten and gloves should be worn while working in the garden. Of course, frequently washing your hands and keeping your hands out of your mouth are also good preventative measures.

Your veterinarian and physician can give you additional advice regarding the prevention of diseases that are transmittable from animals to humans. Always practicing common sense hygienic procedures will enable you to safely enjoy your cats both during your pregnancy and after your baby is born.

Q: Our veterinarian has recommended that we have a procedure called a TPLO performed on our dog's rear leg. Our dog has been lame for a long period of time. He often appears to be stiff and is not nearly as active as

he used to be. We are not sure what TPLO stands for or what is going to be done during the surgery.

A: TPLO stands for tibial plateau leveling osteotomy, a complicated surgical procedure of the knee to restore normal function after an anterior cruciate ligament ruptures. The anterior cruciate ligament normally stabilizes the knee. When the ligament ruptures, the bones at the knee joint reposition themselves into an abnormal configuration. This causes pain and loss of mobility.

Most veterinarians who do general practice refer patients requiring the TPLO surgery to a board-certified veterinary orthopedic surgeon at a large referral hospital located in a city or to a veterinary teaching hospital at a veterinary college. Your veterinarian can give you additional advice regarding when and where your particular dog should have surgery.

Send e-mail to copleysd@copleynews.com or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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