

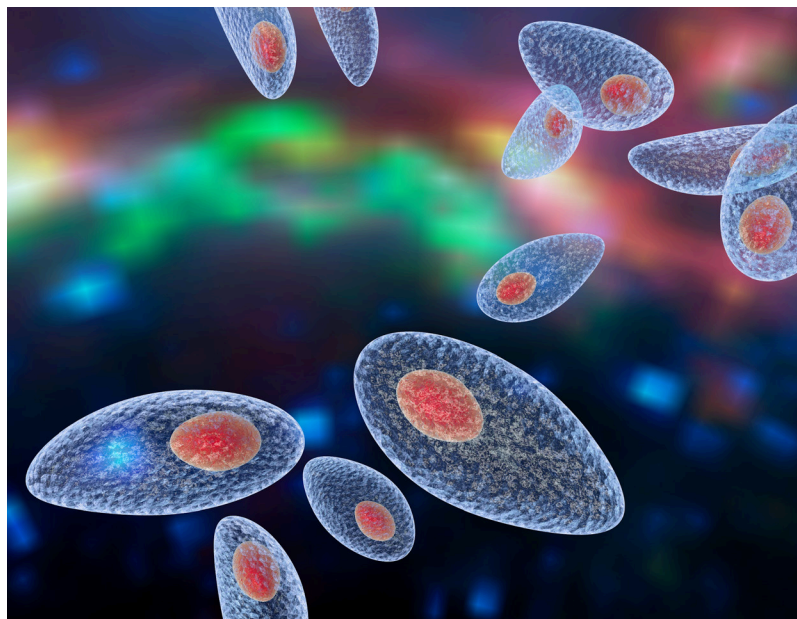


F8 | TOXOPLASMA

WHAT IS TOXOPLASMA?

Toxoplasma gondii is a parasite that can cause the disease toxoplasmosis in humans. The parasite can be transmitted from affected animals to humans and pigs.

Although the disease causes no symptoms in most people, toxoplasmosis can cause severe problems for people with a weakened immune system and for pregnant women.



WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT TOXOPLASMA?

- *Toxoplasma* can cause illness in humans ranging from flu-like symptoms to death, miscarriage, congenital birth defects and blindness.
- It can also cause reproductive failure in sows, including spontaneous abortion.

HOW DOES INFECTION OCCUR?

- The most common way that people or pigs acquire the parasite is through contact with affected cat feces.
- People can get the disease by coming into contact with feces from infected cats, or by eating affected meat that has not been fully cooked, or eating unwashed, contaminated vegetables, or drinking contaminated water. See Figure 1.

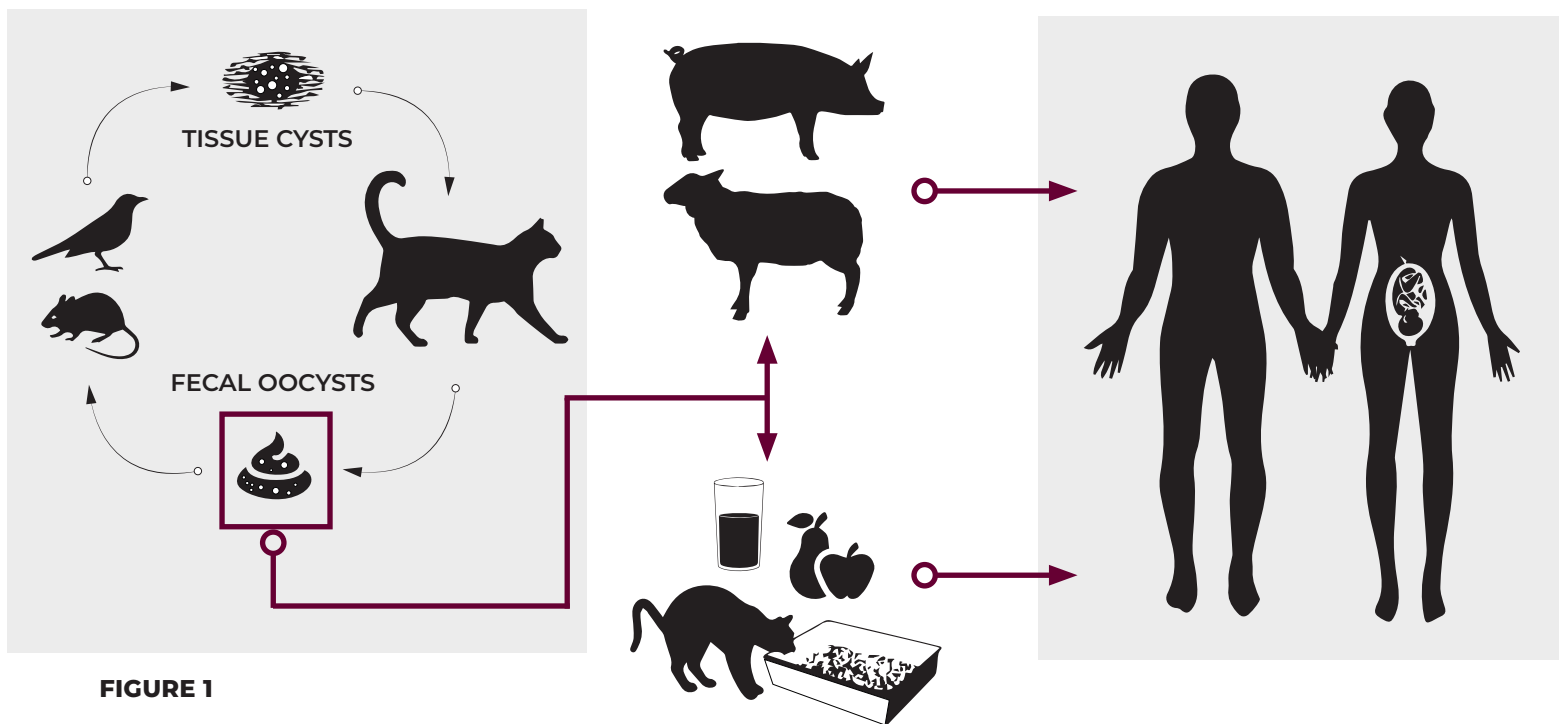


FIGURE 1

WHY CATS SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A RODENT-CONTROL METHOD?

- While cats are considered by some people to be a useful rodent-control method, the rodents they ingest often carry parasites, such as *Toxoplasma*. *Toxoplasma* parasites are highly prevalent in the cat population.
- Although all cats are a risk factor, young cats and cats with weakened immune systems, such as those pregnant and lactating, are at the highest risk of shedding the parasite. Actively-shedding cats can shed thousands of parasites through their feces into the environment. The parasites can survive for more than a year in the environment.
- Pigs that ingest affected feces may develop cysts in their muscle that, if consumed by people in undercooked meat, can cause toxoplasmosis in humans.

HOW DO I PREVENT TOXOPLASMA ON-FARM?

- Do not allow cats to have access to stored feed and pig housing areas.
- Wash your hands after coming into contact with cats, cat feces and cat litter boxes.
- Do not handle placenta or aborted material from sows with bare hands. Wear gloves.
- Dispose of placenta and aborted material in a manner that prevents further animal contact.



PORK PREPARATION

Cooking pork to the recommended end internal temperature of 71°C (160°F) ensures it is safe to eat, even in the presence of Toxoplasma.

FOR LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON TOXOPLASMA, REFER TO THE ELECTRONIC FACT SHEET AVAILABLE ON THE CANADIAN PORK COUNCIL WEBSITE.