



## BABIES AND CATS

*(information from the MSPCA, U.S. Humane Society, Tufts Veterinary School and Best Friends)*

There are many misconceptions about cats and babies and pregnant women. This subject is one of the top reasons cats are surrendered.

### ALLERGIES

Children need pets. Animals provide comfort, companionship, life lessons and the responsibility of caring for something other than themselves. Pets also bolster a child's immune system. A recent pediatric study revealed that not only are children raised with animals less likely to develop allergic reactions to animals, they're less likely to develop allergies in general. That's an excellent reason to have pets in your home.

### CATS IN CRIBS

Cats love warmth and cozy places to sleep, which makes a crib with a sleeping baby a comfy spot. Certainly cats should be supervised around infants. A 10-pound cat draped across a 7-pound baby's chest impairs the baby's ability to breathe. But cats do not 'suck the breath' out of babies. Cats are scent-oriented animals; they may sniff a baby's milky mouth, even give a little lick but that's all.

### TOXOPLASMOSIS

If a pregnant woman becomes infected with toxoplasmosis, her unborn child could suffer liver, kidney and/or lung damage, as well as permanent impaired vision or even blindness. But the reality is that it is highly unlikely for a person to become ill from toxoplasmosis. The CDC says that more than 60 million Americans carry *toxoplasma gondii* (T. gondii), but our immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness.

Although the parasite T. gondii can cause the illness toxoplasmosis in people, cats are not the main source; rather its garden soil and uncooked or poorly cooked meat. An exact chain of events has to occur for a person to be infected by a cat. A cat must pass infected eggs in its stool. The stool must lie in the litter box or outside soil for one to five days, then a person must get the eggs on their hands, lick their hands and swallow the eggs.

You can avoid exposure to T. gondii from cats by doing the following:

- Scoop your cat's litter box every day.
- Wear gloves or wash your hands after cleaning the litter box.
- Keep your cat indoors so it doesn't hunt rodents or birds.
- Don't feed your cat a raw diet; give it commercially-prepared cat food.
- Or the best solution - ask a family member to take on litter box duty while you're pregnant.

If you're still concerned about possible exposure, ask your doctor to perform a simple blood test. If the results show you were exposed to toxoplasmosis during pregnancy, you may be given medication, and your baby may be tested and treated soon after birth. Being pregnant does not mean you have to give up living with and caring for your beloved cat. Most employees in animal shelters are women. Many of these women have handled cats and litter boxes in mass quantities while pregnant without harming themselves or their babies.

