

Toxoplasmosis does not always cause symptoms

Toxoplasmosis is an infection that passes from animals to humans, sometimes without causing any symptoms. When symptoms do appear in children, they vary depending on the child's age and the response of his immune system. Symptoms fall into three basic patterns: 1) congenital toxoplasmosis, where the child becomes infected before birth; 2) toxoplasmosis in an otherwise healthy child; and 3) toxoplasmosis in a child with a weakened immune system.

Congenital toxoplasmosis occurs when a pregnant woman catches toxoplasmosis and remains untreated. In such cases, there is a 10 to 90 percent chance, depending on the timing of infection, that the mother will pass the infection to the developing fetus as congenital toxoplasmosis.

Many women who catch toxoplasmosis during pregnancy pass the parasite to their unborn children through the bloodstream. It is estimated that in the United States today, one of every 1,000 to 8,000 babies is born with a



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toxoplasmosis infection.

Babies who become infected during their mother's first trimester tend to have the most severe symptoms. If a pregnant woman develops a toxoplasmosis infection, a treatment plan should be developed in consultation with an obstetrician and infectious disease specialist.

Children born with congenital toxoplasmosis are treated with different combinations of anti-toxoplasmosis medications plus leucovorin, usually for one year after birth.

While many children born with congenital toxoplasmosis have no symptoms early in infancy, others show clear signs of infection either at birth or within the first month of life. Some are

born prematurely, are unusually small at birth, have a fever or swollen glands, and develop jaundice, yellowed skin and eyes caused by abnormal levels of a liver chemical.

They are also at high risk for eye damage involving the retina, the light-sensitive lining at the back of the eye responsible for sight, resulting in severe vision problems. Some have brain and nervous system abnormalities that cause seizures, limp muscle tone, feeding difficulties, hearing loss, and mental retardation.

If a child is born with congenital toxoplasmosis and remains untreated during infancy, there is almost always some sign of congenital toxoplasmosis, often eye damage, by adolescence.

A healthy child who becomes infected with toxoplasmosis may have no symptoms of infection, or only a

few swollen glands, lymph nodes.

Swollen glands usually appear in the child's neck, are sometimes tender to the touch, and may become larger and smaller over several months.

Children whose immune systems are weakened, for example, by AIDS, cancer, or medications taken after organ transplants, are at special risk for severe toxoplasmosis infections. Especially in children with AIDS, toxoplasmosis can attack the brain and nervous system, causing toxoplasmic encephalitis with symptoms including fever, seizures, headache, psychosis and problems in vision, speech, movement, or thinking.

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by *Toxoplasma gondii*, a microscopic parasite that can live inside the cells of humans and animals, especially farm animals and cats. People can catch toxoplasmosis by touching infected cat feces, even tiny "invisible" amounts, or by eating undercooked, infected meat.

Although the infection doesn't nor-

mally spread from person to person, toxoplasmosis can rarely contaminate blood transfusions and organs donated for transplantation. Once someone catches toxoplasmosis, the parasite remains inside his body cells as a latent (inactive) infection permanently.

Latent infection with toxoplasmosis affects up to 80 percent of the world's population, mostly in warm, humid climates. Although toxoplasmosis parasites may grow and multiply within one week after entering a person's body, it may be weeks or months before symptoms of infection appear, if they appear at all.

When toxoplasmosis parasites contaminate foods, they can be killed by pasteurization, smoking, curing in brine, freezing to -4 degrees Fahrenheit, or heating to 150 degrees Fahrenheit.

To prevent toxoplasmosis at home, cook meats thoroughly. Wash your hands after handling meat, and wash all kitchen surfaces and utensils that

the raw meat contacted. Since toxoplasmosis parasites can also be found on uncooked produce contaminated by animal manure, wash all fruits and vegetables before serving.

If you own a cat, wash your hands after changing the litter, and use detergent and hot water to clean the litter box. If your child has an outdoor sandbox, keep it covered, especially overnight, to prevent wandering cats from using it as a litter box. Since cat feces are a favorite haunt of flies and cockroaches, use window screens, repellents and insecticides to keep your home bug free.

Doctors diagnose toxoplasmosis through laboratory tests that check for microscopic parasites in the blood, spinal fluid, amniotic fluid, placenta, lymph nodes, bone marrow or other body tissues.

Call your child's doctor if your otherwise healthy child develops any of the symptoms of toxoplasmosis, or if you are pregnant and may have had contact with the parasite.

He's all that he can be, even at 34

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP)—Starting a career as a 30-something might not be a problem in many lines of work, but the Army is different.

So when Kelly Kerns walked into the ROTC office at the University of Missouri-Kansas City two years ago, it wasn't his physical appearance that was a problem, it was his age. Kerns, of Lees Summit, would be on track to graduate at 34, the maximum age for a waiver to become a commissioned officer.

Minus the long hair and paunch he had two years ago, Kerns was commissioned in the Missouri Army National Guard on Saturday when his wife and parents pinned second lieutenant's bars to his uniform in a ceremony at the Liberty Memorial.

Kerns looked into ROTC in the fall of 2000, when Maj. Bryce McCloskey sent a letter to everyone at UMKC who was receiving GI benefits, asking them to consider the Reserve Officers'

Training Corps.

Kerns had served four years in the Navy and thought it was the perfect chance to rejoin the military. He had left the Navy in 1992 to take a job as a computer programmer for a medical company, and he missed the pride he felt at serving his country in uniform.

McCloskey was skeptical, though. "When we put them into the Army, they're supposed to be young guys who are physically and mentally tough, so I wasn't sure he could make it," McCloskey said.

"I wasn't being too negative, but I was trying to be realistic. At the time he had three children and a wife and a full-time job. I thought it'd be too much for him, but he proved me wrong."

Kerns convinced McCloskey after a couple weeks of running, swimming and doing push-ups with a group of cadets who were mostly in their 20s.

He dropped more than 20 pounds and had to be fitted for a new uniform,

then set off for five weeks of field training.

His toughest obstacle came in September, as he was working on his last semester of ROTC. His 11-year-old daughter, Emily, and her mother were killed in a crash when the woman lost control behind the wheel and slid into oncoming traffic.

Kerns took a week off from school and work, and it was another two weeks before he seemed like himself in class, his instructor said.

Kerns was devastated, but he remembered how proud Emily had been of his progress, and how she asked him to wear his uniform to special school events. Quitting wasn't an option when he thought about the sacrifices he and his family had made. He wasn't going to fail while his younger classmates succeeded.

"It meant more to me than it did to them, because I'd worked harder for it," Kerns said.

Mayor gives \$1 million from city's reserve to charities

WICHITA (AP) — Mayor Bob Knight is pledging \$1 million from the city's reserve fund to help four charities that are hard hit by recent layoffs. The city's \$1 million includes \$500,000 for United Way of the Plains,

\$350,000 for the Kansas Foodbank Warehouse, \$100,000 for the Lord's Diner and \$50,000 for overflow homeless shelters. Knight is urging elected officials, businesses and working citizens to redouble their efforts to help

more than 10,000 aviation workers laid off over the past 18 months.

"It's absolutely the best Christmas present I have ever had," said Virginia White, executive director of the Kansas Foodbank Warehouse.

KU alumnus stars in football movie

TOPEKA (AP)—Accents, different versions of football and kangaroos were some of the most obvious challenges University of Kansas alumnus Mike Robe overcame in filming "The Junction Boys."

The film, which debuted on ESPN Saturday night, depicts the infamous preseason football camp that Paul "Bear" Bryant ran during his first year at Texas A&M.

Time—as in not having much of it—was the biggest obstacle Robe had to overcome in writing and directing the movie.

Although he has made several films, Robe, 57, is perhaps best known in his home state for "Murder Ordained," the 1987 miniseries he wrote and directed about the murderous affair between Emporia minister Thomas Bird and his secretary, Lorna Anderson.

Last summer ESPN contacted Robe about dramatizing Jim Dent's best-selling nonfiction book about the camp. Of the 111 Aggie potential players who started the camp in desolate, drought-ridden Junction, Texas, in 1954, only 35 finished the 10 days of grueling practices in 114-degree tem-

peratures with little food, water or sympathy.

"He took them there in two buses and brought them back in one," Robe said Friday from New York, where he was attending a screening of the film.

ESPN gave Robe only five weeks to write a script, four weeks to prepare for filming, four weeks to shoot the movie and another four weeks to do all of the post-production work. The station wanted the film to debut after Saturday night's Heisman Trophy awards show.

School may honor do-not-resuscitate orders

LAWRENCE (AP) — The Lawrence school district may become the first in Kansas to require its employees to honor do-not-resuscitate orders for medically fragile students.

After two years of work on the policy, the school board will discuss giving preliminary approval Monday to rules regarding the orders.

In a life-threatening emergency, current policy requires the district's 1,700 employees to call 911, notify admin-

istrators and provide life-support assistance until paramedics arrive.

Under the proposed policy, staff would be expected to call 911 in a medical emergency involving a student covered by DNR orders but the assistance would be limited by the order.

For example, a teacher could make the ailing student comfortable but could not start cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Lawrence police and Lawrence-Douglas County Fire & Medical officials have agreed to collaborate with the district on the policy.

"When it first came to me, my thought was 'My God, why am I dealing with a DNR?'" said Leni Salkind, a school board member on the committee that wrote the policy. "As we worked on it, it became clear that it was important for the district to have a policy."

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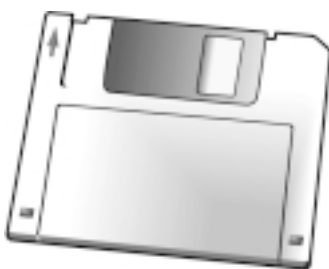
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