

ease has been controlled, all three drugs are usually continued for life. However, the dose of sulfadiazine is reduced significantly and only needs to be taken once a day.

Corticosteroids, such as dexamethasone, are sometimes used to help control inflammation of the brain and the symptoms associated with toxoplasmosis.

Can toxoplasmosis be prevented?

Yes, it can. For people who do not have antibodies to toxoplasma gondii or do have antibodies but no longer have the infection, the best way to prevent toxoplasmosis is to prevent coming into contact with Toxoplasma gondii. Meats such as pork or lamb should never be eaten rare and should be cooked long enough that the internal temperature of the meat is 150-degrees. This is especially true for people in the later stages (stage 3 or 4) of HIV disease.

As for cats and birds, it's always best to use rubber gloves when cleaning cat litter boxes or removing excrement from birdcages. It's also best to clean up after these pets every day; toxoplasma gondii is not infectious in fresh cat or bird excrement, – it takes several days for the organism's eggs to hatch while inside faeces.

The drugs used to prevent toxoplasmosis (prophylaxis) are, for the most part, the same as those used to prevent PCP.

Just as with PCP, co-trimoxazole is the most effective prophylaxis for the prevention of toxoplasmosis. Because PCP prophylaxis is generally started when a person is in the second stage of HIV disease, he or she will be protected against toxoplasmosis when the immune system is more damaged in the third and fourth stages of HIV disease.

For those who cannot tolerate co-trimoxazole due to allergic reactions, another effective option is dapsone in combination with pyrimethamine. Dapsone will need to be taken once a day. Pyrimethamine needs to be taken once a week.

Cryptococcal Meningitis

What is it?

Cryptococcal meningitis is an infection of the spinal cord and brain. It is caused by a fungus, Cryptococcus neoformans, found in soil. It can get into your body when you breathe in dust. It is usually harmless in people with healthy immune systems. In people with AIDS, it can cause serious illness.

What are the symptoms of cryptococcal meningitis?

The first signs of meningitis include fever, fatigue, a stiff neck, headache, nausea and vomiting, confusion and vision problems. The symptoms may come on slowly.

How is cryptococcal meningitis diagnosed?

To look for this fungus, a doctor will need to take fluid from your spine. This is called a spinal tap. A needle is inserted in the middle of your back just above your hips. The needle removes a sample of spinal fluid. The test is safe and usually not too painful. However, some people get headaches after a spinal tap that can last a few days.

How is cryptococcal meningitis treated?

Meningitis is treated with a drug called fluconazole. The drug can be injected directly into the body or taken by mouth. This drug will need to be taken for life to prevent the infection from returning. Fluconazole should be available in all clinics and hospitals. If your clinic or hospital refuses to give it to you when you need it, or does not have stock of it, please contact the Treatment Action Campaign.