Many families enjoy the companionship of pet cats. In addition to the love and affection your feline may share, they may also share something less desirable … toxoplasmosis.

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a single-celled parasite called Toxoplasma gondii. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 60 million people in the United States may be infected by this parasite. Of those who are infected, very few have symptoms because a healthy person’s immune system keeps the parasite in check. However, pregnant women and individuals who have compromised immune systems should be cautious because Toxoplasma infection could cause serious health problems (Centers for Disease Control, 2004).

Toxoplasmosis can be spread by accidentally touching your hands to your mouth after gardening, cleaning a cat’s litter box, or touching anything that has come into contact with cat feces.

So do you need to get rid of your cat? Probably not! However, consider these steps to protect your family from Toxoplasma. Wear gloves when you garden or do anything outdoors that involves handling soil, as cats often use gardens and sandboxes as litter boxes. Wash your hands well with soap and water after outdoor activities, especially before you eat or prepare any foods. Likewise, if your children play in a sandbox, make certain the box is covered when they’re not in it to keep cats from using it as their litter box.
Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life. “Family Album” is a co-production of University of Florida IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and of WUFT-FM. If you'd like to learn more, please visit our website at http://www.familyalbumradio.org.

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