

# What Happens to Blood Donors Who Test Positive for Chagas Disease?



## Fast Facts

CDC estimates 300,000 or more *Trypanosoma cruzi*-infected individuals of Hispanic origin currently live in the United States.

Despite being counseled to seek medical care, only approximately 11% of Chagas seropositive blood donors have contacted CDC for consultation regarding treatment.

Chagas disease may be life threatening even when the patient feels well. Evaluation and treatment can be life saving.

## Chagas Disease Background

- Chagas disease is caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* and is transmitted by infected insects called triatomines
- Chagas disease can also be transmitted by blood transfusion, organ transplantation, congenital exposure, lab accidents, and contaminated food and drink
- Chagas disease is endemic throughout much of Mexico, Central America, and South America, where an estimated 8–11 million persons are infected
- Chagas disease can include cardiac and gastrointestinal manifestations
- There is a small risk of acquiring Chagas disease through infected triatomine bugs in the U.S.
  - The parasite, vectors, and infected animals have been found in many parts of the southern United States

## Blood Donor Screening

- Screening of the U.S. blood supply for Chagas disease began in early 2007, leading to increased identification of people with Chagas disease
- It is estimated that 1 in every 27,500 donors tests positive for Chagas disease nationwide:
  - Majority of U.S. states have identified seropositive donors
  - Updated count of identified donors by state is available at the AABB Chagas Biovigilance Network website <http://www.aabb.org/programs/biovigilance/Pages/chagas.aspx>

## Are Positive Blood Donors Receiving Evaluation and Treatment?

- Treatment may prevent progression to more serious disease
- Antiparasitic medications are only available through CDC and are no cost
- Since blood donor screening began, the number of requests to CDC for consultation and drug release for Chagas disease has increased markedly
- However, only approximately 11% of positive donors or their physicians have contacted CDC for consultation regarding treatment

## Possible Barriers Preventing Positive Donors from Seeking Evaluation and Treatment

- There is very limited awareness of Chagas disease among patients
- Many patients believe there is no effective treatment
- Many patients have limited or no health insurance coverage
- Language barriers exist, as many patients speak only Spanish
- There may be patient concern about immigration status
- There is a lack of awareness of Chagas disease among physicians

## Physician Lack of Awareness of Chagas Disease

- Survey of American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) members:
  - Most members described their knowledge of Chagas disease as very limited
  - Most members reported never considering the diagnosis of Chagas disease among patients from endemic countries
- Survey of members of MedscapeCME, a leading provider of online clinical and medical information for physicians and other healthcare professionals, indicated:
  - Substantial knowledge deficits, especially among obstetricians and gynecologists

## Resources for Chagas Disease Blood Donor Counseling in the United States

- Fact sheets and additional resources are available at [www.cdc.gov/chagas](http://www.cdc.gov/chagas)
- You may contact your local health department regarding:
  - Resources available for positive donors
  - Referral to local physician
- CDC services, including physician consultation, testing, and treatment are available
  - By phone (404) 718-4745 or email to [chagas@cdc.gov](mailto:chagas@cdc.gov)

