

# Chagas Disease

## Provider Fact Sheet

### What is Chagas disease?

Chagas disease is caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* and is spread by infected bugs called triatomines.

### Where is Chagas found?

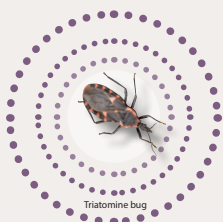
Endemic throughout much of Mexico, Central America, and South America

### Who is at risk?

- Persons living in the U.S. who have migrated from endemic areas
- Estimates of 300,000 or more infected Latin Americans living in the U.S.

### How is the disease transmitted?

- Triatomines thrive in poorly constructed and usually rural housing, typically living within cracked mud walls and thatched roofs
- During the night, the bugs emerge from their hiding places to feed, defecate, and thus inoculate
- Also transmitted by:
  - » Blood transfusion
  - » Organ transplantation
  - » Congenitally
  - » Lab accident (rare)
  - » Food or drink (rare)
- Screening for Chagas disease instituted in early 2007



**Chagas disease may be life-threatening in both the acute and chronic phases of the infection.**

### What are the phases of the disease?

#### Acute

- 4–8 weeks
- Asymptomatic or characterized by mild illness

#### Chronic

##### Indeterminate

- Typically asymptomatic for years or decades

##### Symptomatic

- 20-30% of chronically infected persons develop symptomatic disease
- Cardiac disease beginning with conduction abnormalities may be followed by apical aneurysm and thrombus formation
- Gastrointestinal manifestations
- Increased risk of stroke

### Diagnosing Chagas Disease

- Detailed patient history including having seen the bug and having stayed within mud walls or thatched roofs, in a country with known Chagas risk
- Hispanic patients may be familiar with other names for the insect such as “kissing bug,” “benchuca,” “vinchuca,” “chinche” or “barbeiro”
- Serum samples may be sent to CDC through your state health department
- Patients should be reassured that contact for testing or treatment will have no effect on immigration status

### Treatment of Chagas Disease

- Two drugs, nifurtimox and benznidazole, are worldwide standard antiparasitic treatment
- For more information, please visit the Chagas website at [www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas) and click “Resources for Health Professionals” or call 404.718.4745 for clinical consults
- Fact sheets and contact information provided on the web



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention