

Help Protect Mothers and Their Children from Chagas Disease

Chagas disease is caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* and is typically spread by contact with infected triatomine bugs. However, the disease can also be transmitted other ways, including congenitally. Most people with chronic Chagas disease are asymptomatic but a proportion go on to develop symptomatic disease.

Where is Chagas disease found?

Chagas disease is transmitted throughout much of Mexico, Central America, and South America.

Who is at-risk?

Persons living in the U.S. who have emigrated from Mexico, Central America, and South America are most at risk for Chagas disease, especially those who have:



- Seen this bug
- Stayed in a house with walls that have cracks or crevices

CDC estimates that at least 300,000 infected persons are living in the U.S.

What is the rate of congenital transmission?

The rate of congenital transmission is estimated to be from 1 to 10 out of 100 babies born to infected mothers but may vary by *T. cruzi* strain.



Is testing available for at-risk mothers?

Yes, testing is available. You may send a serum sample to CDC through your state health department.

Is testing available for babies born to mothers who test positive?

Yes, testing is available. CDC recommends sending the following specimens to CDC through your state health department:

- At birth (cord blood), for antibodies and for parasites
- Again at 1 month (whole blood), for parasites
- Again between 9-12 months (serum), for antibodies after maternal antibodies are gone

Is treatment available for persons who test positive?

Yes. Two drugs, nifurtimox and benznidazole, are both effective in treating Chagas disease and are commonly used in other parts of the world as standard antiparasitic treatments. Although neither drug is U.S. FDA approved, both are available through CDC for use under investigational protocols for compassionate treatment. Guidance about evaluation and treatment, along with other resources, may be found at http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas/health_professionals/index.html

Is treatment effective and recommended for everyone with Chagas disease?

Treatment is most effective in early stages of the infection, especially in children. In adults, treatment recommendations vary on the basis of a person's age, progression of disease, overall health, and other factors. Mothers who test positive should not be treated until they have given birth and have finished breastfeeding.

For more information, please visit the Chagas website at www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas click "Resources for Health Professionals" or call **404.718.4745** for clinical consults.