

CHAGAS DISEASE

Neglected Parasitic Infections in the United States



Triatomine bug, which can carry the parasite that causes Chagas disease.

Accessible version: https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas/resources/npi_chagas.html

Chagas disease is a preventable infection caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* and spread by infected insects called triatomine bugs, also known as “kissing bugs.” The initial infection usually does not cause severe symptoms and is often not even diagnosed. After years of chronic infection, some people develop heart diseases such as abnormal heart rhythms, heart failure, and an increased risk of sudden death. Chagas disease can also cause gastrointestinal problems, such as severe constipation and difficulty swallowing.

Infection is typically spread by contact with the triatomine bug, most commonly found in rural parts of Mexico, Central America, or South America. However, the disease can also be transmitted from mother to baby (congenital transmission), through organ transplants, or through blood transfusion. Chagas disease is one of several parasitic diseases that results in significant illness among those who are infected and is often poorly understood by healthcare providers.

CHAGAS DISEASE IN THE UNITED STATES



An estimated 300,000 infected people are living in the United States, nearly all of whom were originally infected in endemic areas. These persons often do not know they are infected and are at risk for severe cardiac or gastrointestinal problems from the disease. Diagnosis and treatment can reduce this risk.



Donor screening to detect *T. cruzi* infection in the blood supply began in early 2007. As of December 2019, **more than 2,460 confirmed positive infections among blood donors were** reported to AABB (formerly American Association of Blood Banks) by blood centers. While these efforts have likely reduced the risk of getting Chagas disease from blood products, the large number of positive donors identified indicates that many people with Chagas disease do not know they are infected and could benefit from diagnosis and treatment.



Infected triatomine bugs and wild animals that harbor *T. cruzi* infection have been found in the United States for decades. There are some reports of vector-borne (spread by contact with the bug) infection originating in the United States.

