

Chagas disease

(*T. cruzi* infection)

What is Chagas disease?

Chagas disease is a disease caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi*, which is transmitted to animals and humans through insects. Chagas disease is found only in the Americas (mainly, in rural areas of Latin America where poverty is widespread).

Who gets Chagas disease?

Anyone can get Chagas disease, but it is mainly found in poverty-stricken areas in Central and South America where homes are made from materials such as adobe, straw, mud, and palm thatch. During the day the insects that carry the parasite live in the walls of these homes and at night they come out while people sleep.

How is Chagas disease spread?

Chagas is spread mainly through insects that carry the parasite leaving feces on people while they are sleeping. The parasite enters the body through the mucous membranes, abrasions (including the insect bite), or breaks in the skin.

Other ways you can become infected with Chagas are:

- Eating uncooked food contaminated with feces from infected insects ;
- Congenital transmission (from a pregnant woman to her baby);
- Blood transfusion;
- Organ transplantation; and
- Accidental laboratory exposure.

What are the signs and symptoms of Chagas disease?

There are two phases of Chagas disease: acute phase and the chronic phase. The **acute phase** lasts for the first few weeks or months of infection. The patient might not show symptoms at this time. It can be difficult to diagnose this disease during the acute phase because the symptoms can be mistaken with other illnesses. Some common symptoms can include fever, fatigue, body aches, headache, rash, loss of appetite, diarrhea, and vomiting.

After the acute phase, most people become better and do not have any further symptoms. However, some people enter a **chronic phase** that may remain silent, or they may develop:

- **Heart problems**, which can include an enlarged heart, heart failure, altered heart rate or rhythm, or heart attack.
- **Intestinal problems**, which can lead to difficulties with eating or passing stool.

The course and severity of Chagas infection may differ from person to person, depending on when, how and where they were infected.

How is Chagas disease treated?

There are two ways to approach treatment for Chagas:

- **Antiparasitic** treatment, to kill the parasite; and
- **Symptomatic** treatment, to manage the symptoms and signs of infection.

Antiparasitic treatment is most effective early in the course of the infection but can be used with any person who has Chagas disease. Most people don't need to be hospitalized for this treatment.

Symptomatic treatment may help people with cardiac or intestinal problems caused by Chagas disease.

How can I prevent getting Chagas disease?

There are currently no drugs or vaccines for preventing Chagas disease. If you are going to a region where Chagas disease is common you should sleep indoors, in well-constructed facilities (for example, air-conditioned or screened hotel rooms). Other preventive measures include spraying infested dwellings with long-lasting insecticides, using bed nets treated with insecticides, wearing protective clothing, and applying insect repellent to exposed skin. Also be aware of other possible routes of transmission such as bloodborne and foodborne routes.

Is donated blood screened for Chagas disease?

Yes, most blood banks will automatically test for Chagas disease. All blood that is contaminated with Chagas disease will be removed immediately from the supply and the donor will be contacted. This will prevent further transmission through blood transfusion and also stop the donor from giving blood in the future. For more information on Chagas disease blood screening please visit the link below.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in your telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191
- Or visit the following links
 - o [CDC Chagas disease page](#)
 - o [CDC blood screening link](#)