

Chagas Disease

Provider Fact Sheet



CS121549

What is Chagas disease?

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

Where is Chagas found?

- Endemic throughout much of Mexico, Central and South America

Who is at risk?

- Persons living in the U.S. who have migrated from these areas
- Estimates of 100,000 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 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 accidents
 - Food and drink
 - Vectorborne (rare in the U.S.)
- Screening for Chagas disease in U.S. blood supply instituted in early 2007

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

- 20-40% 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

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



Diagnosing Chagas disease

- Detailed patient history including having seen the bug and having lived 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
- Drugs available from CDC for use under investigational protocols for compassionate treatment
- For more information, please visit the Chagas website at www.cdc.gov/chagas and click Health Care Providers or call (770) 488-7775 for clinical consults
- Fact sheets and contact information provided on the web

