



Chagas disease, or American trypanosomiasis, is a parasitic disease caused by the protozoan *Trypanosoma cruzi*. It is transmitted by *Triatominae* insects, especially the so-called “kissing bugs” that typically colonize poor-quality dwellings. Chagas can also be transmitted through blood transfusions or organ transplants, vertically from mother to child through the placenta, and through contaminated food. Early symptoms of infection include headache, fever, swelling, cough, and abdominal pain. In the longer term, Chagas can have irreversible and chronic consequences for the nervous system, digestive system and heart, including heart failure. Considered a neglected disease, Chagas affects primarily vulnerable people and perpetuates the cycle of poverty by reducing people’s learning ability, productivity, and earning capacity.

Key facts

- Chagas is endemic in 21 countries of the Americas, affecting an estimated 6 to 8 million people.
- During the 20th century, it caused more deaths and illness than malaria and more than all other tropical diseases combined.
- In the Americas each year, there are 28,000 new cases, and 8,000 newborns become infected during gestation.
- Today some 65 million people in the Americas live in areas of exposure to Chagas and are at risk of contracting the disease.
- Indoor insecticide spraying and housing improvements have been the most critical factors in reducing the burden of Chagas.
- Chagas is nearly 100% curable in its early stages with the drugs benznidazole and nifurtimox.

PAHO/WHO response

PAHO/WHO has supported Member States’ efforts to fight Chagas through measures including:

- Since the 1990s, promotion and coordination of country-to-country and subregional cooperation in prevention and control programs.
- Development and implementation of the 2010 regional Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention, Control and Treatment of Chagas Disease.
- Support for expanded diagnosis and treatment and improvements in care for those infected with Chagas.
- Support for implementing universal screening of blood donors for Chagas disease in 20 of 21 endemic countries.



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For more information, visit: www.paho.org/chagas