

# Chagas Disease



## FACT SHEET

Chagas disease is a parasitic infection caused by the *Trypanosoma cruzi* parasite. It mostly affects people living in rural parts of Latin America. It is estimated that there are approximately 300,000 people in the U.S. with Chagas disease.

*Office of Minority Health and Health Equity*

### What is Chagas Disease?

Chagas disease is a parasitic infection caused by the *Trypanosoma cruzi* parasite. This parasite is found in the feces of an infected blood-sucking triatomine bug. Transmission is from insect-to-human. An infection occurs when feces of the infected bug enter an open wound or mucous membrane such as the nose or eyes. Infection can also be transmitted by:

- Congenital transmission (mother-to-baby)
- Blood Transfusion
- Organ Transplant
- Drinking contaminated water- Usually occurs in outbreaks or endemic areas

Once infected, it is common for people to experience mild to no symptoms, leading them to not know they are infected. In rare cases, the infected person can experience life-threatening illness in the days to weeks after they are infected. The infection can persist for years and some will develop serious heart problems or gastrointestinal tract problems years or decades after infection.



### Chagas Disease Phases

Chagas disease has two phases:

- **Acute/Early phase:** can last weeks to 2-3 months
- **Chronic/Late phase:** can last years to decades

During the early phase, people may experience mild symptoms such as fevers, body aches, tiredness, and swelling around the site where the parasite entered the body. Most people do not develop medical problems after becoming infected but in rare cases the early phase of the disease can be fatal.

During the late phase, about one third will develop serious heart or gastrointestinal problems. Deaths from heart disease are common in the chronic phase and can occur suddenly. People with immune disorders, such as HIV/AIDS or organ transplant patients, are at higher risk of developing severe diseases.

### Treatment Options

**Benznidazole** is the first treatment approved in the U.S. for Chagas disease. Benznidazole is for use in children ages 2 to 12 years old with Chagas disease.

The most common adverse reactions in patients taking benznidazole are stomach pain, rash, weight loss, headache, nausea, vomiting, abnormal white blood cell count, urticaria (hives), pruritus (itching) and decreased appetite.

Benznidazole is not recommended for pregnant women as it can cause fetal harm.

For more information on Chagas Disease, visit CDC's Chagas Disease page at [www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas).

For more information on minority health, go to [www.fda.gov/minorityhealth](http://www.fda.gov/minorityhealth).

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