



CHAGAS DISEASE

Key facts

- Chagas disease or American trypanosomiasis is a parasitic disease caused by the protozoan *Trypanosoma cruzi*. The disease is considered within the group of neglected diseases or a disease of poverty. It is endemic in 21 countries in the Americas.
- *T. cruzi* can infect several species of the triatomine bug, the majority of which are found in the Americas.
- Chagas disease is mainly transmitted to human by the infected feces of blood-sucking triatomine bugs, known as the “kissing bug”. The triatomine bugs are capable of colonizing poorly constructed homes in rural, suburban and urban areas. This infection can also be transmitted by blood transfusions, vertically from mother-to-child through the placenta and by ingestion of contaminated food or beverages.
- With an annual incidence of 30,000 cases in the region of the Americas and 8,600 newborns become infected during gestation. Chagas disease affects approximately 6 million people and causes on average, about 12,000 deaths per year.
- The disease can cause irreversible and chronic consequences to the nervous system, digestive system and the heart. It is estimated that around 70 million people in the Americas live in areas of exposure and are at risk of contracting this disease.
- As long as the health determinants that directly affect Chagas disease or construction materials of houses encourage the presence of vectors and the rapid transmission of the infection, this disease will be very difficult to control.

PAHO/WHO’s response

- Since the early 1990s, the countries affected by Chagas disease have organized to provide a public health response in conjunction with the PAHO/WHO, generating a successful horizontal technical cooperation scheme between countries, through Sub-regional Initiatives of Prevention and Control of Chagas Disease (Southern Cone, Central America-Mexico, Andean countries, and Amazonian countries).
- These countries have managed great achievements in controlling vector-borne transmission of *T. cruzi* including the interruption of vector-borne transmission in 17 affected countries and the elimination of certain species of vectors, implementation of universal screening of blood donors for Chagas disease in 21 endemic countries, increased coverage and capacities of diagnosis and treatment of congenital cases of Chagas, expanded coverage of diagnosis and access to treatment, and clinical care of people infected and sick.
- El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Mexico reached the elimination of *Rhodnius prolixus* as main vector between 2009 and 2010, respectively. South America reached the elimination by *T. infestans* vector, in Brazil (Sao Paulo) and Uruguay, in 2012 and 2014, respectively.
- Through PAHO/WHO, the countries receive between 3,000 and 4,000 Nifurtimox treatments each year. Benznidazole, which is now produced in Argentina and Brazil, can be purchased through the PAHO/WHO Strategic Fund.
- The World Health Assembly 2010 resolution [WHA63.20](#) and PAHO/WHO 2010 resolution [CD50.R17](#), establish and implement the current Strategy and Plan of Action for Chagas disease prevention, control and care.
- PAHO/WHO 2009 resolution [CD49.R19](#) and 2016 resolution [CD55.R9](#) of Neglected Infectious Diseases, provide a frame of reference on controlling and eliminating Chagas disease as public health problem.