



## CHAGAS DISEASE

### What is Chagas disease?

- 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, hiding during the day and becoming active at night, biting people while they are asleep.
- The parasites enter the body when someone who has been bitten instinctively scratches the bite and thus introduces feces left by the insect into the wound created by the bite, or subsequently touches another open cut/wound, an eye, or their mouth.
- Chagas can also be transmitted through blood transfusions or organ transplants, from mother to child through the placenta, and through contaminated food.
- Early symptoms of infection include headache, fever, swelling, cough, and abdominal pain. However, the disease can evolve free of symptoms and clinical signs throughout its life in 70% of cases. In the longer term, 30% of affected can have irreversible and chronic consequences for the nervous system, digestive system and the heart, including heart failure.
- Chagas can be cured, if the treatment is administered in children or is administered shortly after infection. During the chronic phase of the disease in adults, an antiparasitic treatment can stop or prevent the progression of the condition, if it is administered with strict medical care.
- Chagas affects primarily vulnerable people and perpetuates the cycle of poverty by reducing people’s learning ability, productivity, and earning capacity.
- To prevent the bites of transmissor insect is recommended: spraying dwellings and their surroundings with insecticides, improving housing to prevent infestation by the vector, use mosquito nets, and hygienic practices, among others.

### Key facts

- Chagas disease can be treated with Benznidazole and also Nifurtimox. Both medicines are almost 100% effective in curing the disease if given soon after infection at the onset of the acute phase.
- Chagas disease is endemic in 21 countries in the Americas, and affects approximately 6 million people.
- In the Americas, Chagas disease show an annual incidence of 30,000 new cases average, 14,000 deaths per year, and 8,000 newborns become infected during gestation.
- It is estimated that around 70 million people in the Americas live in areas of exposure and are at risk of contracting this disease.

### 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.
- In 2016, the Directing Council of PAHO/WHO approved resolution [CD55.R9](#), which establishes a plan for the elimination of neglected infectious diseases, including Chagas disease.