



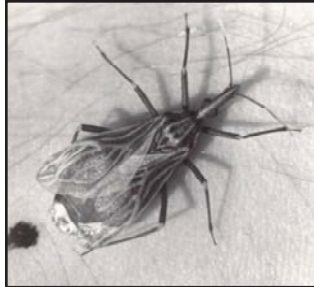
**American  
Red Cross**

# BLOOD BULLETIN

## CHAGAS DISEASE

### What is Chagas Disease?

Chagas disease is caused by the parasite *T. cruzi*, which is transmitted by a blood sucking bug. The bug comes out at night and tends to feed on people's faces, giving it the nickname, "the kissing bug."



The bug passes the parasite to humans when its feces enter the person's bloodstream through mucus membranes or cracks in the skin. Since the parasite lives in the blood, it can be transmitted through a blood transfusion.

The kissing bug is found only in the Americas, primarily rural areas of Latin America in houses made from mud, straw, adobe and palm thatch. Although the bug is limited to those areas, the parasite and the disease are not. An increase in population movement of infected people from these regions has brought Chagas disease to other areas of the world.

### Disease Progression and Prognosis

Some symptoms of Chagas disease may occur a few weeks or months after infection. These symptoms usually fade away on their own within a few weeks or months, but the infection will remain if untreated.

In other cases, infection may remain silent for decades. Even though the person may show no symptoms, the parasite attacks the heart and smooth muscles including the wall of the esophagus and colon. This can cause heart rhythm problems, heart failure or intestinal complications.

### Chagas Testing and Blood Donation

Since there is a recognized risk Chagas disease can be passed through blood transfusion, screening donated blood for Chagas disease will help make the blood supply safer for everyone. The FDA has approved a sensitive and specific screening test that gives the Red Cross the ability to examine blood for Chagas. All blood products that test positive for Chagas disease are destroyed.

Since Chagas disease is a lifelong infection, the Red Cross will not accept blood donations from people who have tested positive for Chagas. Although there is a very low risk of getting Chagas from a blood transfusion, there is absolutely no risk of getting the disease from donating blood.

(For more information please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))

To schedule a blood donation appointment, please call 1-800 GIVE LIFE.  
For more information, visit [www.HelpSaveALife.org](http://www.HelpSaveALife.org)