



Less than 10% of those infected with Chagas disease receive timely diagnosis and treatment

PAHO calls for detection of all cases and equitable access to care for this disease, which causes about 30,000 new infections each year



Washington, DC, April 14, 2022 (PAHO)- Due to its silent nature, less than 10% of those infected with Chagas disease each year receive timely diagnosis and, therefore, effective treatment in Mexico, Central America, and South America, where the disease affects between 6 and 8 million people, most of whom live in areas with high levels of poverty and transmission.

On [World Chagas Disease Day](#), April 14, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is calling for countries to step up efforts to diagnose all suspected cases. It is estimated that 70% of those affected are unaware they have been infected. The theme for 2022 focuses on finding and reporting every case to defeat Chagas disease.

Chagas disease is a potentially fatal parasitic disease caused by the microorganism

Trypanosoma cruzi. It is transmitted to humans by insects - known as vinchucas, kissing bugs, or chirimachas, by blood transfusion or organ transplantation, by consuming contaminated food, and during pregnancy and labor.

"Efforts made by countries of the region to prevent and control vector transmission that began in the 1990s show that ending Chagas disease is possible," said Dr. Marcos Espinal, Director of Communicable Diseases and Environmental Determinants of Health at PAHO. "This World Day is an opportunity to raise awareness of Chagas disease and double down on actions to prevent it, detect it, treat it and break the chain of transmission," he said.

Of the 21 countries in the region where Chagas disease is endemic, 17 have managed to interrupt vector-borne transmission in homes at the national or subnational level. Annual deaths have also been reduced from an estimated 45,000 in 1990 to 10,000 today, and the population exposed to these insects has dropped from around 100 million to 70 million in the last 30 years.

Around 8,000 babies are born with Chagas each year in the region making mother-to-child transmission the main route of infection and spread in countries that have controlled vector-borne transmission, improved housing standards, and implemented universal screening in blood banks.

"If we want to defeat Chagas disease, we must maintain efforts to eliminate vector transmission in countries that have not yet achieved this, promote universal Chagas screening for all women of reproductive age and offer free treatment to all those who test positive," said Dr. Luis Gerardo Castellanos, head of PAHO's Neglected Infectious Diseases unit. In addition, "pregnant women with Chagas should be monitored from the beginning of their pregnancy and treated after giving birth. Their newborns should then be tested and treated if found to be positive," he said.

Chagas disease has expanded from rural to urban areas and has crossed the borders of Latin America due to humans traveling to countries and continents that are unaware of the disease, and where transmission occurs through blood transfusion or congenital transmission, affecting thousands of people.

It is estimated that up to 30% of patients with chronic disease may develop complications in the long term, which can have irreversible and chronic consequences for the digestive system and the heart. However, if detected early, the disease can be cured, or its clinical course improved. In the chronic phase, treatment can slow or delay its progression.

PAHO is working to strengthen the capacity of health professionals to diagnose and treat the disease in a timely and appropriate manner in all suspected populations,

particularly in women and newborns, to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of Chagas disease and three other diseases. These efforts are part of a [PAHO initiative](#) that seeks to eliminate Chagas disease and other infectious diseases by 2030.

Chagas disease in the Americas in numbers:

- The disease is endemic in 21 countries in the region.
- About 70 million people live at risk of contracting the disease in the region through the bite of an insect vector that transmits Chagas.
- 7 out of 10 people who have Chagas are unaware of their condition
- More than 10,000 people die each year due to clinical complications of the disease.
- Chagas disease is almost 100% curable if treated in its initial, acute stage.
- Between 2 and 8% of pregnant women infected with Chagas disease can transmit it to their babies.
- All 21 endemic countries maintain universal screening of blood donors
- The average prevalence of blood bank donors detected with Chagas in Latin America is 0.2%

Links

- [Chagas disease](#)
- [Guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of Chagas disease](#)
- [Chagas: The Silent Disease - YouTube](#)

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.