

CHAGAS' FAQ

What is Chagas'?

Chagas' disease is caused by a parasite called *Trypanosoma cruzi*. The parasite is usually found in Latin America, but is seen very rarely in the U.S. Infections are transmitted mainly by the feces of blood sucking bugs that have the parasite.

Can I contract Chagas' if I travel to South America?

It is not likely. The people most at risk for contracting the disease are those who regularly sleep in poorly constructed houses found in the rural areas of Central and South America. Houses constructed from materials such as mud, adobe, or thatch, are more likely than others to be infested with triatomine bugs. Travelers planning to stay in hotels, resorts, or other well-constructed housing facilities are **not** at high risk for getting Chagas disease naturally.

Can I contract Chagas' through a blood transfusion?

There have been seven known transmissions of the Chagas' parasite to blood recipients in North America since 1987. It is likely that other transmissions occurred but were not recognized. Thus, while it is possible to be infected, this is a very rare event.

How long have the public health authorities and blood centers been aware of this disease?

This is a very old disease. Transmission by blood transfusion was recognized in Latin America more than 50 years ago. However, transmission of Chagas' in the U.S. has been a rare event and an appropriate blood donor screening test was not available. It should be noted that implementation of the test will be a precautionary measure and an opportunity to determine the actual prevalence of antibodies to *Trypanosoma cruzi* in the U.S. and estimate the potential for transmission of the parasite.

Why did it take so long to develop this test?

The development of donor screening tests is a highly complex and sophisticated procedure. The tests need to be highly sensitive to detect as many infected individuals as possible and highly specific, to avoid the generation of an unacceptable number of false positives leading to inappropriate notification of test results to donors and the unnecessary discard of needed blood donations. The FDA has set up very strict requirements for the development and approval of a donor screening test. The process takes years and involves the research testing of tens of thousands of donors and patients to validate the system.

Has the Food and Drug Administration mandated the use of the Chagas' test?

Following licensure of a test, FDA will begin working on a draft guidance prescribing how the test will be utilized and donors will be managed. We expect publication of a final guidance recommending testing after review by the Blood Products Advisory Committee and incorporation of comments made by the public.

Are there resources to help individuals with positive test results?

Blood centers are developing informational materials for prospective donors and for donors who have positive test results. Infected donors will be referred to their physicians. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will post a substantial amount of information for patients and physicians in their website. Physicians can also resort to their State Departments of Health and can even have patient specimens referred for testing.

For more information on Chagas', please visit the [CDC](#) Web site.