

What Happens to Blood Donors Who Test Positive for Chagas Disease?

Fast Facts

CDC estimates 300,000 or more *Trypanosoma cruzi*-infected individuals of Hispanic origin currently live in the United States.

Despite being counseled to seek medical care, only approximately 11% of Chagas seropositive blood donors have contacted CDC for consultation regarding treatment.

Chagas disease may be life threatening even when the patient feels well. Evaluation and treatment can be life saving.



Chagas Disease Background

- Chagas disease is caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* and is transmitted by infected insects called triatomines
- Chagas disease can also be transmitted by blood transfusion, organ transplantation, congenital exposure, lab accidents, and contaminated food and drink
- Chagas disease is endemic throughout much of Mexico, Central America, and South America, where an estimated 8–11 million persons are infected
- Chagas disease can include cardiac and gastrointestinal manifestations
- There is a small risk of acquiring Chagas disease through infected triatomine bugs in the U.S.
 - The parasite, vectors, and infected animals have been found in many parts of the southern United States

Blood Donor Screening

- Screening of the U.S. blood supply for Chagas disease began in early 2007, leading to increased identification of people with Chagas disease
- It is estimated that 1 in every 27,500 donors tests positive for Chagas disease nationwide:
 - Majority of U.S. states have identified seropositive donors
 - Updated count of identified donors by state is available at the AABB Chagas Biovigilance Network website <http://www.aabb.org/programs/biovigilance/Pages/chagas.aspx>

Are Positive Blood Donors Receiving Evaluation and Treatment?

- Treatment may prevent progression to more serious disease
- Antiparasitic medications are only available through CDC and are no cost
- Since blood donor screening began, the number of requests to CDC for consultation and drug release for Chagas disease has increased markedly
- However, only approximately 11% of positive donors or their physicians have contacted CDC for consultation regarding treatment

Possible Barriers Preventing Positive Donors from Seeking Evaluation and Treatment

- There is very limited awareness of Chagas disease among patients
- Many patients believe there is no effective treatment
- Many patients have limited or no health insurance coverage
- Language barriers exist, as many patients speak only Spanish
- There may be patient concern about immigration status
- There is a lack of awareness of Chagas disease among physicians

Physician Lack of Awareness of Chagas Disease

- Survey of American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) members:
 - Most members described their knowledge of Chagas disease as very limited
 - Most members reported never considering the diagnosis of Chagas disease among patients from endemic countries
- Survey of members of MedscapeCME, a leading provider of online clinical and medical information for physicians and other healthcare professionals, indicated:
 - Substantial knowledge deficits, especially among obstetricians and gynecologists

Resources for Chagas Disease Blood Donor Counseling in the United States

- Fact sheets and additional resources are available at www.cdc.gov/chagas
- You may contact your local health department regarding:
 - Resources available for positive donors
 - Referral to local physician
- CDC services, including physician consultation, testing, and treatment are available
 - By phone (404) 718-4745 or email to chagas@cdc.gov

