

CHAGAS DISEASE

Chagas disease (American trypanosomiasis) is caused by a parasite mainly spread by “kissing bugs.” It mostly affects people and animals in rural areas of Mexico, Central America, and South America. It is rare in the United States and even rarer to catch it from kissing bugs here.



HOW DO PEOPLE GET IT?

The parasite spreads through the poop of infected kissing bugs.

The parasite spreads through infected kissing bugs—not from their bites themselves, but when the bug’s feces come into contact with a person’s mouth, eyes, or an open wound, such as a cut or bug bite. Oral transmission is less likely through humans but is the main route of infection in pets and wild animals who eat the bug.

It cannot spread from person to person like colds or through casual contact with infected people or animals.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms may take up to two weeks to appear. However, most people don’t get sick at all.

Symptoms may include:



Swollen eyelids



Fever



Diarrhea



Rash

These symptoms usually go away in about 8 weeks.

If not treated, the infection can cause serious health problems later, such as complications during pregnancy, passing the infection to a baby (congenital Chagas disease), or long-term heart or digestive issues. Without treatment, the infection can last for life.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Mainly people who have lived in rural parts of Mexico, Central America, or South America for a long time.

Up to 80 adults in Champaign County may have untreated Chagas disease, but the real number is probably closer to 50, since cases have been going down in Latin America.

Families with a known history of Chagas disease may want to talk to their doctor about testing.

KISSING BUGS IN ILLINOIS

There is one local species (*Triatoma sanguisuga*, or the eastern bloodsucking conenose), found most commonly in southern Illinois, but it rarely carries or spreads the disease to people.

Other bugs may look similar but are harmless.



Source: CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/chagas/spreads/index.html>

PROTECTING YOURSELF

If traveling to rural Latin America:

- Stay in well-built, air-conditioned, or screened rooms.
- Use bug spray in places where you're staying and sleep under treated bed nets.

There is no vaccine or medicine to prevent the disease yet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

CDC services, including physician consultations on testing and treatment, are available by phone at 404-718-4745 or by email at chagas@cdc.gov.

For more information on Chagas disease: www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas/



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