



# World Chagas Disease Day

## Why in News?

The [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) observes **World Chagas Disease Day** every **April 14<sup>th</sup>** to raise awareness about the little-known disease that affects millions of people, especially in Latin America.

- The **72<sup>nd</sup>** [World Health Assembly](#) dedicated this day to the disease in 2019.
- This year's theme is **“time to integrate Chagas disease into primary health care”**.

## What is Chagas Disease?

### ▪ About:

- Chagas disease, also known as **"silent or silenced disease"**, is a **communicable parasitic disease** that infects 6-7 million people and claims around **12,000 lives every year worldwide**, according to WHO.
  - The **disease is named after physician Carlos Chagas** who first detected it in a Brazilian child in 1909.

### ▪ Causes:

- It is caused by the **protozoan Trypanosoma cruzi**, transmitted by a family of bugs called **'triatomines'** or **'kissing bugs'** that infect healthy individuals through bites or defecation.
- It can also be contracted through **congenital transmission, blood transfusions, organ transplantation, consumption of uncooked food** contaminated with **fecal matter of infected bugs**, or accidental laboratory exposure.
  - It **cannot propagate by casual contact** with infected humans or animals.

### ▪ Symptoms:

- The disease **manifests as fever, headaches, rashes, inflammatory nodules, nausea or diarrhea**, and muscle or abdominal pain. 4
  - **70-80% of patients show no symptoms** throughout their lives, making early detection challenging.
- **20-30% of infections** evolve into the chronic stage, causing **damage to the heart, digestive system, or nervous system**.

### ▪ Prevalence:

- Chagas is currently endemic in **21 countries in the Americas**, with an annual average incidence of 30,000 new cases, according to the **Pan-American Health Organization**.
  - Rare cases have been reported in the **southern United States** as well as **many European, Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Pacific countries**.

### ▪ Treatment and Prevention:

- There are **currently no vaccines available for Chagas disease, but antiparasitic medicines Benznidazole and Nifurtimox** can treat the disease. They have a **100% efficacy rate if administered at the onset** of the acute stage.
- Preventive measures have been put in place by countries to eliminate the bugs or reduce infections.
  - **Universal screening of blood donors and blood products** is done by all Latin American countries and other countries reporting new cases.

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