

## Kissing bugs and Chagas disease in Louisiana



*Triatoma sanguisuga*, kissing bug in the southern US  
The main vector of Chagas Disease in Louisiana

### What is a Triatomine bugs?

Also called "kissing" bugs, assassin bugs, cone-nosed bugs, and blood suckers. They can live indoors, in cracks and holes of substandard housing, or in a variety of outdoor settings including:

- Beneath porches
- Between rocky structures
- Under cement
- In rock, wood, brush piles, or beneath bark
- In rodent nests or animal burrows
- In outdoor dog houses or kennels
- In chicken coops or houses

They are typically found in the southern United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America.

There are 4 different species found only in the USA  
[http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas/gen\\_info/vectors/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas/gen_info/vectors/index.html)

### Kissing bugs in the West bank and other regions of Louisiana

In our state the main vector species is *Triatoma sanguisuga*. This bug is only found in the US, and is not from Latin America. A study by Tulane University in the West bank found that 60-70% of the bugs collected are infected with the parasite *T. cruzi*.

### What is Chagas disease?

Also called American trypanosomiasis, it is caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* and it is transmitted to people and animals by triatomine bugs or kissing bugs. This disease represents a major public health problem in America. It is widely distributed throughout the American continent, from the southern half of the United States (US) to Argentina, and infects at least 6 million people in endemic areas. Although the US was initially defined as non-endemic for Chagas disease because of rare human cases, the presence of *T. cruzi* has now been amply demonstrated in kissing bugs from different regions of the southern half of the country, ranging from Florida to California.

### Chagas Disease in Louisiana.

The first human case from Orleans parish was reported in 2006 in a woman from rural New Orleans, in the West bank area. This disease **is not transmitted person to person, it is not contagious.**

Infection is most commonly acquired through:

- Contact with feces of an infected triatomine
- Mother to baby (Congenital)
- Blood transfusion with contaminated blood products
- Organ transplant from an infected person
- Laboratory accident
- Contaminated food or drink

### Symptoms

- Infection may be mild or asymptomatic. There may be fever or swelling around the biting site (where the parasite entered into the skin or mucous membrane when the person scratches).
- Many years after the first contact with the parasite some symptoms could appear:
  - Irregular heartbeat
  - Congestive heart failure

About 25% of infected people will eventually have symptoms

**Important!** Inform your doctor if you have some of these symptoms, if you have been in an area at risk of Chagas Disease in the US or in Latin America.

### Treatments

To kill the parasite, Chagas disease can be treated with benznidazole and also nifurtimox. Both medicines are almost 100% effective in curing the disease if given soon after infection at the onset of the acute phase. However, the efficacy of both diminishes the longer a person has been infected.



If you find a kissing bug, **do not touch it directly**. Use gloves or a plastic bag to place it in a Ziploc bag or other container.

If you find a kissing bug take a picture and please contact:

Dr. Claudia Herrera [cherrera@tulane.edu](mailto:cherrera@tulane.edu)

Dr. Eric Dumonteil [edumonte@tulane.edu](mailto:edumonte@tulane.edu)

Phone: (504) 9883558 at Tulane University

Do you want to know more about this bug in your neighborhood?

We will have a Chagas fair where will be talking about this disease.

How can we and the community work together to keep this disease away? Also we will be doing a small survey about Chagas disease

**If you want to participate please let us know. We will be sending more information about it!**