

# Study finds asymptomatic Chagas patients are at a high risk for cardiac disease

August 31 2020

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People living with Chagas disease without symptoms or signs of cardiac injury are at high risk of developing cardiomyopathy, a progressive heart disease, and the risk more than doubled among patients with acute infections, according to a new study from the University of Colorado School of Medicine at the Anschutz Medical Campus.

The study was published today in *JAMA Network Open*.

Chagas disease is caused by a parasite, *Trypanosoma cruzi*, and is prevalent throughout Latin America. The disease is also a growing health concern in the U.S., affecting an estimated 300,000 people according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"It's important to study infections like Chagas disease and its tie to fatal or disabling cardiac disease because it can help inform public health programs that can save people's lives," said lead author Andrés Henao-Martínez, MD, assistant professor of infectious diseases at the CU School of Medicine. "We're hoping our research can be used by clinicians and public health agencies to implement Chagas screening programs, as well as enhance the treatment of asymptomatic individuals."

The researchers conducted a [systematic review](#) and meta-analysis of cardiomyopathy development in patients with Chagas disease. The goal was to address, for the first time in a scientific framework, the compiled data on factors contributing to progression from the acute phase or the

indeterminate form of Chagas disease to the chronic cardiac form, as well as the annual rate of cardiomyopathy development.

The study found that asymptomatic people living with Chagas disease—without evidence of cardiac injury— or individuals with acute infection are at significantly increased risk to develop cardiomyopathy at annual rates of 2 percent and 5 percent, respectively.

"Now knowing this, public health programs and clinicians must develop more robust screening programs for Chagas disease that includes assessment for antitrypanosomal treatment at the time of diagnosis," Henao-Martínez adds. Antitrypanosomal drugs are the only proven efficacy against Chagas [disease](#).

Provided by CU Anschutz Medical Campus

Citation: Study finds asymptomatic Chagas patients are at a high risk for cardiac disease (2020, August 31) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-08-asymptomatic-chagas-patients-high-cardiac.html>

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