

# Chagas disease kills 10,000 people a year in Latin America

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Little-known Chagas disease is a silent killer in Latin America, where it takes 10,000 lives a year, and more must be done to detect the condition early on, the Pan American Health Organization said Thursday.

The disease is increasingly being detected outside the region, however, and PAHO says it "affects more than six million people in the world."

Caused by the *T.cruzi* parasite, and mainly transmitted through [insect bites](#), the disease is almost 100 percent curable if detected and treated early, PAHO said in a [press release](#) on the eve of World Chagas Day.

"Chagas is a disease that few know about, although it affects millions of people," Jarbas Barbosa, director of PAHO, said in the release.

The illness—named after Brazilian physician Carlos Chagas who discovered it in 1909—is often asymptomatic, and only about one out of 10 people are diagnosed.

The insect that most commonly carries the parasite is known as the vinchuca, and lives in the mud, adobe, straw and palm thatch of rural homes. But blood transfusions and eating contaminated food can also lead to infection.

If detected in time, the disease can be cured or its course can be improved. In the chronic phase, treatment can slow down or delay its progress, but in its absence, in the long term, up to 30 percent of

sufferers can develop irreversible nervous system and cardiac disorders.

Chagas disease remains endemic in 21 countries in the Americas but it is spreading to other continents as human mobility increases, PAHO said.

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