

For Immediate Release

October 26, 2020

A Triatomine Insect or, “Kissing Bug”, Tests Positive for *Trypanosoma Cruzi*

Wichita Falls, Texas – A lab test has confirmed that a Triatomine insect, commonly known as the “kissing bug”, collected in Wichita County has tested positive for the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi*, which causes Chagas disease. Kissing bugs are a blood feeding type of insect commonly found throughout the Southern United States. Though not new to the area, a recorded presence of Chagas disease in Wichita County is rare. Kissing bugs may be attracted to lights at night and their attraction to house lights may cause them to enter a home. A single kissing bug is not necessarily cause for alarm, but they can infest human and animal bedding and breed. The presence of nymphs or immature kissing bugs in a home suggest that a breeding population may have formed nearby and a licensed pest control company may need to be contacted.

The Wichita Falls-Wichita County Public Health District encourages citizens to avoid these bugs by implementing the following practices:

1. Avoid opening windows that are not screened or that have torn screens, especially at night. Kissing bugs are winged insects and can enter the home through unscreened windows.
2. Wear long sleeves, pants, and gloves when working outdoors in brush piles to avoid accidental bites.
3. Do not attempt to handle bugs barehanded, if you wish to catch the bug and submit for testing use a glove or plastic bag to collect the insect. Sanitize any surface that the bug may have touched; the disease is transmitted through their feces.

If you find a kissing bug outside of the home and it is not suspected to have bit anyone, it may be sent to Texas A&M University Kissing Bug Citizen Science Program. Submission information can be found at: <http://kissingbug.tamu.edu/Contact/>.

If you find a kissing bug within your home or it is suspected of having bitten someone, it should be sent to the Texas Department of State Health Services. Submission information can be found at: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/idcu/health/zoonosis/Triatominae/>.

Untreated Chagas disease is a lifelong infection. Chagas has two phases, an acute and a chronic. The acute phase may be mild or asymptomatic with the primary issue being swelling at or near the bite. Most people then enter a prolonged asymptomatic form of the disease where few or no parasites can be found in the blood. Many people are never aware of their infection; however, 20-30% of infected people may develop severe medical problems over the course of their life such as heart rhythm abnormalities, a dilated heart which doesn't pump well, or a dilated esophagus or colon which can cause eating difficulties or difficulties passing stool. Like many diseases, Chagas disease is most dangerous to those with suppressed immune systems (for example, due to AIDS or chemotherapy).

For more information about Chagas disease, you may visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/chagas/disease.html>.

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