

Malicious disease spreads to Europe

Health/Science

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By Andrea Roensberg for Deutsche Welle, May 8, 2018 Heart problems - that's how Chagas disease may manifest itself. But by then, the infection will have been in a patient's body for many years. That's why the disease is rarely treated. But it also has to do with poverty. This story may start with a bug bite somewhere in rural Bolivia. In a ramshackle home with cracked walls that offer shelter to a bug called the 'kissing bug.' "Kissing bug," because it likes to bite its victim's face at night. The bite itself wouldn't be so bad, if it wasn't for the fact that the bug defecates or urinates after biting. Caught unaware, the sleeping victim will itch and scratch, rubbing a parasite into its body that transmits Chagas disease. Infections go unnoticed In most cases, the infection will go unnoticed. "Some 90 percent of those infected with Chagas disease show no symptoms," says Doctor Jaime Altcheh, a pediatrician who heads up the department of parasitology and Chagas disease at a major children's hospital in the Argentinian capital of Buenos Aires. It may be 20 or 30 years after that initial bug bite that a person may start having serious heart problems, or digestive problems. By then, the disease has become very difficult to cure. What's more, a woman is very likely to have passed the infection on to her children during pregnancy or birth, or a blood donor may have unknowingly passed on the infection. Bolivia: Most cases per 100 inhabitants With some 1.5 million people infected - according to data compiled by the World Health Organization (WHO)- Argentina has the most cases of Chagas disease. But it is Bolivia that has the highest number of cases relative to the size of its population. [...]

Spreading from Latin America to the world Chagas is endemic in 21 countries on the Latin American continent. The overwhelming majority of people living with Chagas disease live in Latin America. At least six million people are infected with Chagas disease according to WHO. But the disease has long spread to countries where the "kissing bug" doesn't exist. The WHO estimates that around 100,000 people in Europe are infected with Chagas disease. [...]

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