

# Chagas Disease



# CVCA

Cardiac Care for Pets

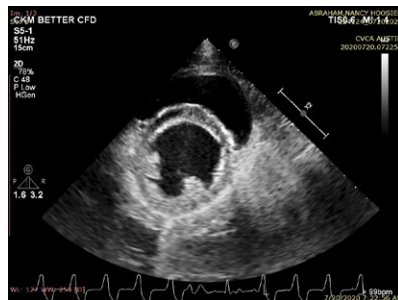
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## Facts about Chagas disease:

- Chagas disease affects dogs by damaging the right side of the heart.
- Dogs become infected after either getting bit by or eating a kissing bug or assassin bug.
- Both the bugs and the disease are common in Texas and Gulf Coast states, with as many as 18% of shelter dogs in Texas infected.
- The bite of the bug infects the dog with a parasite that travels in the bloodstream.
- The parasite (*T. cruzi*) prefers to settle in the muscle of the right side of the heart where it can cause major complications.
- Once in the heart muscle, it can cause rhythm problems, muscle weakness and poor heart function.
- In the early stages of infection, dogs feel normal.
- Over months or years, the infection damages the heart.
- Affected dogs can die from heart failure (fluid in their lungs or belly) or from sudden death.



kissing bug



## Signs of Chagas disease in dogs can include:

- A rhythm problem found by your family vet
- Getting more tired on walks or when playing
- Weakness and/or collapse
- Bloating/swelling of the abdomen (belly)
- Fainting
- Coughing and difficulty breathing

## Can I get Chagas disease from my dog?

- There are no reported cases of canine to human transmission.
- If your dog has Chagas disease, you do not need to make changes in your day to day life.

## How will I know if my dog is infected?

- Concern regarding Chagas disease arises when dogs are diagnosed with serious heart rhythm problems, requiring the need for examination by a veterinary cardiologist.
- The cardiologist will diagnose the specific heart rhythm problem and perform an ultrasound of the heart—at which time a right heart enlargement or a weakened muscle could indicate the presence of the parasite.
- If the family has traveled to Texas or Gulf Coast states, a blood test called a Chagas screen and titer would be performed and, in most positive cases, would mean the patient has an active infection.

## Tests needed to diagnose Chagas disease:

- An **ECG** to check the heart rhythm.
- A **Holter monitor** device the dog wears to check the heart rhythm (for more than 24 hours), gather more information about any heart rhythm problems and help guide treatment.
- An **echocardiogram**, which is an ultrasound of the heart that measures the heart size and function as some patients with Chagas disease start with a normal heart and get progressively worse.
- A **blood test** to check for antibodies to the parasite with a positive test showing a titer of greater than 1:60.

## Treatment:

- The medication for affected dogs manages the damage the parasite causes and can:
  - » improve the heart rhythm
  - » improve the strength of the heart
  - » decrease any fluid that builds up in the body
- There is no specific treatment to get rid of the parasite.

## Outcome:

Outcomes are variable, but if the patient has fluid buildup or rhythm problems, the average is a one year survival.



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