

What is Chagas disease?

Also referred to as American trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease is an infection caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi*. An estimated 16 to 18 million people are affected by Chagas disease. Approximately 50,000 people infected with Chagas die each year.

The disease is spread to humans and other mammals by blood-sucking Reduviid bugs, or “kissing bugs”. This most frequently occurs in substandard housing. The parasite is spread to humans when the feces of an infected bug enters the body through mucous membranes, the eyes, or open wounds and cuts. Early stage symptoms are usually mild. As the disease progresses, the infected person develops serious chronic symptoms, including heart disease.

Is transmission of Chagas disease through an allograft possible?

The *T. cruzi* parasite has an affinity for the heart muscle (myocardium), and the parasite is known to survive cryopreservation. Therefore, the American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB) has identified Chagas disease as a risk for recipients who receive allograft heart valves and non-valved conduit grafts that are cryopreserved. Other tissue types have not been identified as a risk.

Does LifeNet Health test or screen for *Trypanosoma cruzi*?

LifeNet Health utilizes the Donor Risk Assessment Interview (DRAI), which is comprised of more than 30 categories of questions designed to uncover situations in any potential donor that would preclude the donation process. When administered by a properly trained medical professional, the likelihood of transmission of viral, bacterial, fungal, prion and other pathogens becomes remote. All donors accepted for tissue recovery are subjected to a rigorous screening and testing process that exceeds the requirements set forth by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB).

The AATB’s Standards for Tissue Banking require that heart valve donors in particular be evaluated for risk of Chagas disease. All cardiac donors are screened during the DRAI. Donors who are identified as a risk are tested for Chagas antibodies.

Since 1995, over 4 million bio-implants processed using Allowash Technology have been distributed by LifeNet Health, with no disease transmission.