



Kissing Bugs & Chagas Disease

Kissing bugs

- ◆ Or “bloodsuckers”, “conenose bugs” (Hemiptera: Reduviidae) are blood-feeding insects that occur throughout the southern United States as well as in most of the tropical areas of the world.
- ◆ They feed on a wide range of mammals, birds, and reptiles, preferring to live in close proximity to their hosts in such places as wood piles, burrows, rocks, and nests.
- ◆ Nocturnally active, kissing bugs will occasionally enter houses in Texas. Their bite is usually painless, with some subsequent redness and itching. A very small number of individuals may develop a more serious hypersensitivity reaction.
- ◆ Two of the most commonly encountered kissing bug species in Texas are pictured below. All have a similar general appearance including a long narrow head, and a long needle-like proboscis kept tucked under the head when not feeding. Color pattern around the abdomen is variable.



Top: *Triatoma gerstaeckeri* ♀
Bottom: *Triatoma sanguisuga* ♂

For additional information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/chagasdisease/index.htm>

Chagas Disease

- ◆ Caused by the protozoan parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi*, Chagas Disease manifests as an illness of the heart or gastrointestinal tract.
- ◆ The parasite is deposited in the feces of the bug and transmission occurs when the feces are rubbed into the bite wound, abrasions, or mucous membranes of the host. Other modes of transmission include transplacental, blood transfusion, organ donation, and ingestion.
- ◆ Infection rates in kissing bugs in Texas are reported to be 17-51%.
- ◆ An estimated 12 million people suffer from the disease on the American continents, but in the U.S. only 8 human cases (5 in TX) due to insect exposure have been reported.
- ◆ Numerous acute and chronic cases have been reported in domestic dogs from southern states including TX, OK, LA, GA, TN, SC, and VA.
- ◆ Acute stage symptoms in dogs may include lethargy, ascites, anorexia, dyspnea, and cardiac rhythm disturbances. Puppies born to infected mothers may develop heart failure and sudden death.
- ◆ Chronic stage symptoms often include weakness, GI disturbances, and right-sided or bilateral cardiac dysfunction.

Instructions for mailing specimens:

Place bug (dead or alive) in pill vial or other empty container. Although ethanol is acceptable, it is preferable not to place the specimen in a preservative. If bug is alive, place slightly moistened cotton ball or swab with bug in a ventilated vial. Place vial in box or padded envelop. Please call or email before sending specimens.

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