

Recognition for Chagas disease

On May 24, 2019, the World Health Assembly voted to designate April 14 as World Chagas Day. The decision came after several years of advocacy efforts spearheaded by the International Federation of Associations of People Affected by Chagas Disease. April 14, 1909, was the day on which Carlos Ribeiro Justiniano Chagas first diagnosed the condition to which he gave his name, although the earliest detected case of *Trypanosoma cruzi* infection in a human being was in a 9000 year old Chinchorro mummy.

Aside from raising public awareness, an official day could attract the attention of donors. Researchers and advocates tend to publish papers and annual reports around the day. "Having a world health day can make a lot of difference for neglected tropical diseases, like Chagas disease, where

you have low detection rates, very low percentages of patients treated, and the general public do not know what the disease is", explains Pedro Albajar Viñas (WHO, Geneva, Switzerland).

Chagas disease affects an estimated 6 million people, primarily in 21 countries of Latin America. Because most cases are asymptomatic, patients typically present late. "Everything about Chagas disease is complicated", said Michel Lotrowska, regional director, Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) Latin America. "It is hard to diagnose, the drugs can bring such severe side-effects that a lot of patients stop using them, and it is not easy to test for cure."

Earlier this year, DNDi released details of a phase 2 study, which showed that a 2 week course of benznidazole was as effective as the standard 8 week course

but was considerably easier to tolerate. However, obtaining funding for a phase 3 trial of an old drug is no small task. DNDi is also testing fexinidazole in a phase 2 study; if successful, the drug could become the first new treatment for Chagas disease in several decades. Last November, the European Medicines Agency recommended fexinidazole as a treatment for human African trypanosomiasis caused by *Trypanosoma brucei gambiense*. "There is so much uncertainty in Chagas disease that there is a tendency to do nothing", Lotrowska told *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*. "I hope having a day for the disease might bring the hope that countries and health programmes will take some risks and try to come up with some solutions".

Talha Burki



For details of DNDi's trial see <https://www.dndi.org/2019/media-centre/press-releases/study-shows-dramatically-shorter-treatment-chagas-effective-and-safer/>

Infectious disease surveillance update

Ebola in DR Congo update

As of June 9, 2062 cases of Ebola have been reported in DR Congo since the outbreak began in August, 2018. The cases have been reported in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. 1964 cases have been confirmed and 94 are considered probable cases. 1390 patients have died and 569 have recovered. A further 280 cases remain under investigation. A total of 131 860 people have been vaccinated so far with the rVSV-ZEBOV vaccine. Of those vaccinated, 36 424 were high risk contacts, 65 341 were contacts of contacts, and 30 095 were front-line health-care providers.

Dengue in Honduras

As of May 11, 8017 cases of dengue fever have been reported in Honduras since the beginning of 2019, including 24 deaths. In 2018, 7942 cases were reported across the whole year in Honduras including three deaths.

60% of cases have been reported in Cortés department.

Cholera in Yemen

18 171 cases of cholera with 13 associated deaths were reported in Yemen between April 29 and May 5. 15 cases were reported as severe. 668 891 cases have been reported for 2019 so far, with 1081 deaths. 22 of the 23 governorates and 294 of the 333 districts in Yemen have reported cases. The most cases have been reported in Amanat Al Asimah (50 166), Sana'a (36 527), Al Hudaydah (30 925), and Ibb (26 421) governorates.

Syphilis in Japan

The National Institute of Infectious Diseases in Japan has reported 2472 cases of syphilis from the beginning of the year to May 26. The highest number of cases have been reported in Tokyo (639) followed by Osaka (425), Aichi (131), and

Hyogo (120). Usually, fewer than a 1000 cases have been reported annually since the 1970s; however, cases have started to increase in recent years, with almost 7000 reported in 2018.

Listeria in England

Six people were diagnosed with serious listeria infection between April 25 and May 15, 2019, including three people who died from their illness. The deaths occurred in hospitals in Manchester (n=2) and Liverpool (n=1). All cases were in patients who had eaten prepackaged sandwiches during a stay in hospital. The contamination was traced back to the meat supplier for the sandwich company. The sandwiches and salads linked to the cases have been withdrawn and the supplier has ceased operations while the investigation continues.

Ruth Zwizwai



For more on Ebola in DR Congo see https://mailchi.mp/sante.gouv.cd/ebola_kivu_10juin19

For more on dengue in Honduras see <http://outbreaknewstoday.com/honduras-dengue-epidemic-tops-8000/>

For more on cholera in Yemen see <http://www.emro.who.int/pandemic-epidemic-diseases/cholera/outbreak-update-cholera-in-yemen-12-may-2019.html>

For more on syphilis in Japan see <https://www.niid.go.jp/niid/en/data/8898-idwr-sokuho-data-e-1921.html>

For more on listeria in England see <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/06/09/public-not-warned-listeria-outbreak-contained-experts-insist/>