



## East African Trypanosomiasis (tri-PAN-o-so-MY-a-sis)

### What is East African trypanosomiasis?

There are two types of African trypanosomiasis (also called sleeping sickness); each is named for the region of Africa in which they were found historically. East African trypanosomiasis is caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense* (tri-PAN-o-SO-ma BREW-see-eye rho-DEE-see-ense), which is carried by the tsetse fly. Each year, 500 to 1,000 new cases of East African trypanosomiasis are reported to the World Health Organization. However, many cases are not recognized or reported due to a lack of infrastructure and the true number of cases is higher. Infection of travelers is rare. Since 1967, thirty-seven cases of East African trypanosomiasis have been diagnosed in the United States, all among individuals who had traveled to eastern Africa.

### How is East African trypanosomiasis spread?

An person will get East African trypanosomiasis if he or she is bitten by a tsetse fly infected with the *Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense* parasite. The proportion of tsetse flies that are infected with this parasite is low. The tsetse fly is found only in rural Africa.

### Is East African trypanosomiasis a serious illness?

Yes. If a person fails to receive medical treatment for East African trypanosomiasis, death will occur, usually within months.

### Where can you become infected with East African trypanosomiasis?

East African trypanosomiasis is found in parts of Eastern and Southeastern Africa. More than 95% of cases are reported from Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia.

### What are the symptoms of East African trypanosomiasis?

A bite by the tsetse fly is often painful and can develop into a red sore, also called a chancre (SHAN-ker). Fever, severe headaches, irritability, extreme fatigue, and aching muscles and joints are common symptoms of sleeping sickness. Some people develop a skin rash. Progressive confusion, personality changes, and other neurologic problems occur after infection has invaded the central nervous system. If left untreated, infection becomes worse and death will occur within months.

### How soon after infection will I have symptoms of East African trypanosomiasis?

Symptoms usually begin within 1 to 3 weeks after an infective bite.

### What should I do if I think I may have African trypanosomiasis?

If you suspect that you may have East African trypanosomiasis, immediately consult with your health care provider who will order several tests to look for the parasite. A skin biopsy may be done if you have a chancre. Blood tests will be done and a spinal tap may also be performed.

**What is the treatment for East African trypanosomiasis?**

Medical treatment of East African trypanosomiasis should begin as soon as possible and is based on the infected person's laboratory results. Medication for the treatment of East African trypanosomiasis is available through CDC. Hospitalization for treatment is usually necessary. Periodic follow-up exams that include a spinal tap are required for 2 years.

**Once infected, am I immune to East African trypanosomiasis?**

Even if you had the disease once, you can get re-infected.

**Who is at risk for contracting East African trypanosomiasis?**

Tsetse flies are found in woodland and savannah areas and they bite during daylight hours. Travelers to urban areas are not at risk. The persons most likely to be exposed to the infection are tourists, hunters, and others working in or visiting game parks. Villagers with infected cattle herds are also at risk.

**Can I take a medication to prevent East African trypanosomiasis?**

There is neither a vaccine nor recommended drug available to prevent East African trypanosomiasis.

**How can I prevent African trypanosomiasis and prevent other insect bites?**

1. Wear protective clothing, including long-sleeved shirts and pants. The tsetse fly can bite through thin fabrics, so clothing should be made of medium-weight material.
2. Wear neutral-colored clothing. The tsetse fly is attracted to bright colors and very dark colors.
3. Inspect vehicles for tsetse flies before entering. The flies are attracted to moving vehicles.
4. Avoid bushes. The tsetse fly is less active during the hottest period of the day. It rests in bushes but will bite if disturbed.
5. Use insect repellent. Though insect repellents have not proven effective in preventing tsetse fly bites, they are effective in preventing other insects from biting and causing illness.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have a parasitic infection, consult a health care provider.*

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From [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/trypanosomiasis/ea\\_trypanosomiasis\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/trypanosomiasis/ea_trypanosomiasis_factsheet.pdf)



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