

## **LEPROSY (Hansen's Disease) Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***What is leprosy?***

Leprosy (Hansen's disease) is a chronic bacterial disease that mainly affects the skin and nerves.

### ***How do people get leprosy?***

Leprosy is spread person-to-person through respiratory droplets and requires close contact between individuals.

### ***What are the symptoms of leprosy?***

The most common signs of leprosy are hypopigmented or erythematous (i.e., red) skin lesions or macules. Other symptoms include peripheral nerve swelling or thickening, thickened dermas, nasal excretions, and epistaxis.

### ***How soon do symptoms appear after infection?***

Leprosy has a long incubation period typically ranging from 9 months to 20 years.

### ***Who is at risk of developing leprosy?***

Most individuals are not at risk of developing infection from *Mycobacterium leprae*, the organism that causes leprosy. Close contacts of infected individuals who are not taking antibiotics to treat their infection are at highest risk of becoming infected.

### ***When and for how long is a person able to spread leprosy?***

A person is able to spread leprosy through nasal mucosa until beginning multi-drug antibiotic therapy. After the first dose of treatment, a person is considered non-infectious.

### ***What is the treatment for leprosy?***

Leprosy is curable with antibiotics. Multi-drug therapy is very effective and infected individuals are considered non-infectious after only a few doses of antibiotics. Depending on the form of leprosy, treatment may last for as long as 3 to 4 years but typically ranges from 6 to 12 months.

### ***How can I prevent leprosy?***

If you are in close contact with an individual with leprosy who is not receiving antibiotic treatment, take precautions to avoid contact with nasal secretions or mucosa.

### ***Additional Information:***



- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/>
- National Hansen's Disease (Leprosy) Program: <http://www.hrsa.gov/hansens>
- World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs101/en>