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 erythromatous (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: https://www.hrsa.gov/hansens-disease/index.html
- World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/leprosy