



LEPROSY  
(Hansen's Disease)  
Frequently Asked Questions  
(Last updated 5 May 11)

*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: [http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/hansens\\_disease/technical.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/hansens_disease/technical.html)
- National Hansen's Disease (Leprosy) Program: <http://www.hrsa.gov/hansens>
- World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs101/en>