



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Boston Public Health Commission
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Leprosy

(Hansen's Disease)

What is leprosy?

Leprosy is a chronic bacterial disease that usually affects the skin and nerves in the hands and feet. It is rare in the United States.

Who gets leprosy?

Anyone can get leprosy. Children and persons who are in close contact with infected patients that have never been treated for disease are at an increased risk.

How does leprosy spread?

Although it is uncertain how leprosy spreads, the germs probably enter the body through the nose and possibly through broken skin.

What are the symptoms of leprosy?

There are two different kinds of leprosy. One type, called tuberculoid leprosy, causes one or more well-defined skin lesions that are numb. The other type, lepromatous leprosy, causes many similar looking skin bumps and lesions on both sides of the body and a chronically stuffy nose.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

It usually takes about 3 to 5 years for symptoms to develop. In many cases it takes less time for tuberculoid leprosy symptoms to appear than for lepromatous leprosy.

How long is a person able to spread leprosy?

In many cases, a person will not infect others 3 months after starting treatment.

What is the treatment for leprosy?

Treatment is usually many different drugs for 6 months to 2 years.

How can leprosy be prevented?

The best way to prevent the spread of leprosy is to have those infected with the illness receive early diagnosis and treatment. Those in close contact with a person who has leprosy are recommended to also seek medical examinations immediately and each year thereafter for at least 5 years.

**For more information, please contact
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Communicable Disease Control
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