



LEPROSY (HANSEN'S DISEASE) FACT SHEET

WHAT IS LEPROSY??

Leprosy (also known as Hansen's disease) is an infection caused by slow-growing bacteria. It can affect the nerves, skin, eyes, and lining of the nose. Leprosy was once feared as a highly contagious and devastating disease, but now we know it doesn't spread easily and treatment is very effective.

HOW DO YOU GET LEPROSY?

It is not known exactly how leprosy spreads between people. Scientists currently think it may happen when a person with leprosy coughs or sneezes, and a healthy person breathes in the droplets containing the bacteria. Prolonged, close contact with someone with untreated leprosy over many months is needed to catch the disease.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms mainly affect the skin, nerves, and mucous membranes (the soft, moist areas just inside the body's openings). Leprosy can be recognized by appearance of patches of skin that may look lighter or darker than the normal skin. Sometimes the affected skin areas may be reddish. Loss of feeling in these skin patches is common.

TREATMENT

Leprosy is treated with a combination of antibiotics. Treatment usually lasts between one to two years. The illness can be cured if treatment is completed as prescribed. Discuss treatment options with your doctor.

DPHD EFFORTS

Reports of suspected and confirmed cases of disease are made to the Delaware Public Health District (DPHD). The DPHD investigates potential sources of illness, conducts surveillance for the spread of disease, and engages in community outreach and education.