



1. What is leprosy?

Leprosy is a chronic bacterial disease of the skin, nerves, eyes, nasal mucosa and upper airway. The disease is not commonly acquired in the United States, and is mainly found in immigrants from poor countries.

2. How do you get leprosy?

How the disease is spread remains unclear, but anyone can get leprosy if exposed to the bacterium that causes it. It is assumed that leprosy is spread by contact with droplets from the nose and mouth of a person who has the disease. The germs are presumed to enter the body through broken skin.

3. What are the symptoms of leprosy?

Leprosy mainly targets and affects the skin and nerves. The symptoms of leprosy:

- Skin lesions with loss of feeling
- Nose bleeds and congestion
- Skin discoloration
- Eye and limb damage

Leprosy has different forms from mild to severe:

← Tuberculoid (Mild) ——— Borderline ——— Lepromatous (Severe) →	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Few skin lesions in a limited area of the body	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nodules (bumps) and rash all over the body
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nerve damage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Airway disease
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Difficult to diagnose	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Eye disease
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Easier to diagnose

It takes an average of 4 years to show signs of the disease, but it can take as long as 20 years to appear.

4. What are the serious health problems you can get from leprosy?

All forms of leprosy may cause nerve damage that results in injuries because the patient no longer feels pain and gets injured easily. After a long time with the disease, a person may lose the use of the fingers, toes, and other body parts due to repeated injuries. If the disease is left untreated, there may be permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs, and eyes.

5. How is leprosy treated?

Leprosy can be cured with a combination of several antibiotics. The treatment takes at least 6 to 12 months. A big advantage is that the medication makes the patient non-infectious rapidly, which reduces the risk to others. There are possible side effects that may come with treatment, so it is important for the patient to check with his/her doctor regularly.

6. How can leprosy be prevented?

Leprosy is not easily spread. Most family members do not catch it even after years of living with the client. However, family members are at higher risk than anyone else.

To reduce this risk of spreading the disease, the patient should:

- Take the medications as prescribed by their doctor.
- Properly throw away tissue after blowing his/her nose so others are not exposed.
- Wash hands thoroughly to avoid spreading germs to another person.

The bad effects of leprosy can be prevented with early detection and treatment.

Sources

1. *Leprosy*. World Health Organization.
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs101/en/>
2. *Leprosy*. National Institutes of Health.
<http://www3.niaid.nih.gov/topics/leprosy/Understanding/whatis.htm>