

What is Hansen's disease?

Hansen's disease (commonly referred to as Leprosy) is a chronic disease due to an infection with a bacterium similar to the bacterium that causes tuberculosis. The main targets are the skin and nerves, though other organs can be involved. If not treated, the nerves are attacked and patients may be unable to feel pain when they get injured or burn themselves. The resulting wound may lead to ulcers. In addition, muscle weakness and paralysis may occur. Serious disabilities such as deformities may occur. However, prompt and appropriate treatment prevents most of these complications.

What are the symptoms of Hansen's disease?

Hansen's disease is associated with skin lesions (located identically on both sides of the body), spots on the skin that are light colored, bumps, and thickened skin. The nose is often affected, causing congestion and nosebleeds.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of Hansen's disease usually will not start to appear until *several years* after contact with a person with this disease.

How is Hansen's disease spread?

Although the exact method of spread is not clear, it appears that this disease is spread by tiny droplets from the nose. However, not all people are susceptible, or prone, to getting this disease. In fact, only 5% of the population is thought to be susceptible. In addition, it appears that living in the same household with a person with this disease for a long period of time is necessary for spread of this disease; casual contact with someone over brief periods of time does not put people at risk.

How long is a person infectious?

Once a person has been on medication for 3 days, he or she can no longer spread the disease to others and can return to usual activities.

What is the treatment for this illness?

There are effective antibiotics that can be used to treat this disease, but these antibiotics must be taken over a long period of time (at least two years).

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

People with Hansen's disease, including healthcare providers, can return to their usual activities (including work and school) after being on medications for 3 days. After this time, they are no longer considered to be able to spread this to others.