

# FAQ:leprosy

## What causes leprosy?

A germ, or bacillus, called *Mycobacterium leprae*. It's called *M. leprae* for short.

## Why is leprosy also called Hansen's disease?

Norwegian doctor Armauer Hansen was the first to view the bacillus under a microscope in 1873.

## Do fingers and toes fall off when someone gets leprosy?

No. The bacillus attacks nerve endings and destroys the body's ability to feel pain and injury. Without feeling pain, people injure themselves on fire, thorns, rocks, even hot coffee cups. Injuries become infected and result in tissue loss. Fingers and toes become shortened and deformed as the bone is absorbed into the body.

## What are the early signs of leprosy?

Early signs include discolored or light patches on the skin with loss of feeling. When nerve trunks in the arm are affected, part of the hand becomes numb and small muscles become paralyzed, leading to curling of the fingers and thumb. When leprosy attacks nerves in the legs, it interrupts communication of sensation in the feet.

The feet can become subject to damage through untended wounds and infection. If the facial nerve is affected, a person loses the blinking reflex of the eye, which can eventually lead to dryness, ulceration, and blindness. Bacilli entering the mucous lining of the nose can lead to internal damage and scarring which in time causes the nose to collapse. Untreated, leprosy can cause lasting disability.

## How is leprosy cured?

Leprosy can be cured with Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT) a combination of antibiotics. MDT drugs are Rifampicin, Clofazimine, and Dapsone. Treatment can take from six months to two years, sometimes longer.

For more information about the cure for leprosy visit [www.effecthope.org/learn/cure-and-care/](http://www.effecthope.org/learn/cure-and-care/)

## How does one catch leprosy?

Research investigating transmission is on-going. There are many theories. One commonly accepted theory is that *M. leprae* is transmitted primarily through coughing and sneezing. Bacilli are discharged, perhaps on droplets or dust particles that others inhale.

## Is leprosy highly contagious?

No. Approximately 95% of people are believed to have a natural immunity to leprosy.

## Is there leprosy in Canada?

Yes. There are approximately 500 people in Canada who have been diagnosed with leprosy. Since leprosy is not highly contagious, they are not infectious or a public health concern, and are being looked after by our health care system in the tropical disease units of major urban hospitals. Leprosy is usually contracted by a person prior to their arrival in Canada.

## How much does it cost to provide a cure for someone suffering with leprosy?

It costs only \$396 to offer the complete cure and comprehensive care for one person!

The cost of the actual Multi-Drug Therapy medicine is covered by the generous financial support of the Novartis Foundation.

## I would like to know more about leprosy.

Visit [www.effecthope.org](http://www.effecthope.org) for more information and to read stories of people affected by leprosy