



LEPROSY

What you need to know...



The Leprosy
Mission
Australia



Source: WHO 2015

Leprosy still exists



Someone is diagnosed with leprosy every 2 minutes.



Leprosy is found all over the world – sometimes even in Australia. It is most common in places of poverty. Overcrowding and poor nutrition means people's immune systems are not strong and they are less able to fight the disease.



India accounts for 60% of new cases each year.



Leprosy is an infectious disease



Leprosy is classified as a Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) by The World Health Organisation (WHO). Also known as 'Hansen's Disease' after the scientist who discovered the cause.



Leprosy is caused by bacteria – either *Mycobacterium leprae* or *Mycobacterium lepromatosis* – it can affect people differently depending on their own level of immunity.



Research suggests the bacteria is not spread through touch alone but through prolonged, regular exposure to a person carrying the disease. It is thought to be most likely transmitted through water borne droplets (coughing and sneezing).







Leprosy has visible effects



Leprosy may be initially seen as discoloured skin patches or as raised nodules but it can often take 1 – 20 years of incubation before any visible or physical effects are noticed.



Sometimes the cartilage which shapes and supports the nose can be destroyed and the nose can collapse.



Hair follicles can be affected causing eye brows to drop out. This means sweat and water can get more easily into the eyes obscuring vision. In some cultures, having no eyebrows is seen as a disgrace.



*EARLY DIAGNOSIS AND
CARE CAN MINIMISE
THESE EFFECTS.*

- DR GRACE WARREN



Leprosy can cause permanent disability



Leprosy can attack and destroy the nerves in the body, especially in the hands, feet and face resulting in loss of feeling and/or function.



If leprosy is not correctly diagnosed or medical attention is not sought or provided, the nerve damage can result in problems that can be permanent. Ulcers on the hands or feet that won't heal, deformities of hands with clawed fingers and abnormal function of the feet so they can no longer walk normally because of a drop foot or similar condition.



Reconstructive surgery and physiotherapy can make a huge difference for many people. But in some cases where the disease has been neglected and severe infection and ulceration has occurred, amputation may be the only option. An artificial limb may be possible to provide increased function and mobility.



THE BIGGEST DISEASE TODAY IS
NOT LEPROSY OR TUBERCULOSIS,
BUT RATHER THE FEELING OF
BEING UNWANTED, UNCARED FOR,
AND DESERTED BY EVERYBODY.

— MOTHER TERESA

Leprosy can cause blindness



The leprosy bacteria can attack the eye itself and the nerves around the eye and the eyelids causing paralysis. If unable to close the eyes, debris and insects can easily cause damage, eventually leading to permanent blindness.



Leprosy affects relationships and mental health



When someone is affected by leprosy, those around them may isolate or reject them (or even their whole family) out of fear and lack of understanding. Relationships, marriages and families can breakdown. Communities may divide. It can even have a bearing on marriage prospects.



Dealing with the disease itself can cause a great amount of stress and fear. Feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, depression or worse are not uncommon for people affected by leprosy. Counselling for individuals and their families can be beneficial.

Stigma and discrimination still exists



Myths around leprosy still exist in most countries. Fear of rejection by family and friends can prevent people seeking diagnosis and treatment. That puts them at higher risk of nerve damage and disability.

Community Education in general health, sanitation and leprosy is essential. By eradicating stigma, those affected can integrate into their communities and get on with living life.



Leprosy is a disease of poverty



Leprosy is most often found in communities where there is widespread poverty, limited access to health care and where nutrition and general health is poor. Lack of education, poor sanitation, geographic isolation and meagre incomes all contribute to an increased risk of infection. Providing sanitation and access to clean water is imperative.



For people affected by leprosy and/or disability, the stigma that they face can thrust them deeper into the cycle of poverty as they are prevented from working to support themselves or their families. Education and training can make a real difference.

Children in Nigeria enjoy fresh water from a pump supplied by people like you through The Leprosy Mission.




Leprosy is CURABLE!



With a course of Multi Drug Therapy (MDT), usually over the course of 12 months, a person affected by leprosy can be cured. In fact, within 48 hours of beginning the treatment they are no longer infectious and pose no threat of passing on the disease to those around them.

If diagnosed and treated early enough, they should have few, if any, ongoing problems.



A photograph of a man with a mustache, wearing a light-colored shirt, looking towards the camera. In the foreground, a person's hands are holding a red blister pack of medicine. The blister pack contains several rows of white and dark capsules. The text on the blister pack includes 'Free of charge' and 'for the treatment of leprosy'.

**Together with
supporters like you,
The Leprosy Mission
cures, cares for and
restores people
affected by leprosy.**



**The Leprosy
Mission**
Australia

The Leprosy Mission Australia

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ACFID
MEMBER



FROM DEATH TO NEW LIFE

Samana's story – Nepal

My mother committed suicide when she was diagnosed with leprosy. I was just 7 years old.

My father was left to raise me, and my siblings, alone.

When I was 13, I found out I had leprosy too.

My fingers became twisted and I could hardly move my hand. I hid because I was afraid.

My father was worried. He didn't want the story of my mother to be repeated...

Thanks to supporters like you, Samana and her family's life has been transformed.

**WATCH
& LISTEN to
their journey!**



Photo by Daniel Christiansz Photography.