

# Leishmaniasis

## Fact Sheet



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### What is leishmaniasis?

Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease that is found in many different parts of the world. It is caused by infection with *Leishmania* parasites and cause several different forms of illness. The most common forms are cutaneous leishmaniasis, which causes skin sores, and visceral leishmaniasis, which affects internal organs.

### How do people get it?

People get leishmaniasis from the bite of an infected sand fly. Sand flies are very small, quiet, and active from dusk until dawn. In very rare occasions the parasite may be acquired from contaminated needles or blood transfusions.

### What are the symptoms of cutaneous leishmaniasis?

Some people will not show any symptoms. People who show clinical disease have one or more sores on their skin. The sores usually start out as bumps or lumps and may end up as ulcers. Some people may have involvement with the linings of their mouth, throat, and nose, called mucosal leishmaniasis.

### What are the symptoms of visceral leishmaniasis?

Some people will not show any symptoms. People who show signs of disease usually have fever, weight loss, swelling of the spleen and liver, and low blood counts. If untreated it often leads to death.

### How soon after infection do symptoms occur?

Symptoms occur anywhere from weeks to years after infection. When the skin is affected, sores usually occur within a few weeks or months of the sand fly bite. When organs are affected, symptoms usually occur within months to years following the sand fly bite.

### In what parts of the world is this infection found?

It is found in some parts of Asia, the Middle East, parts of Africa, southern Europe, some parts of Mexico, Central America, and South America. On rare occasions it has been acquired in the southern United States.

### Who is at risk for infection?

Anyone can be infected if they live or travel in areas where the parasite is found. It is more common in rural areas. People who may have increased risk of infection include adventure travelers, Peace Corps volunteers, people in the military, and missionaries.

### How is it diagnosed?

Leishmaniasis needs to be diagnosed by a health care provider. They will discuss travel history and then arrange for laboratory testing.

### What is the treatment?

Treatment is dependent on a health care provider's recommendation. Some forms may clear without treatment, while others may require prescription medications.

### Are there vaccines to prevent it?

No vaccines are currently available.

### How can I protect myself from infection?

The best way to prevent infection is to avoid sand fly bites. If traveling to an area where leishmaniasis is found there are some actions you may take to reduce the risk of infection:

- Avoid outdoor activities from dusk to dawn when sand flies are most active
- Wear protective clothing
- Use an EPA-approved repellent
- Stay in well-screened or air-conditioned areas
- Sleep under a treated bed net with a very fine grade of mesh – sand flies are smaller than mosquitoes and can get through smaller holes

### Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.