



LEISHMANIA INFORMATION SHEET

What is Leishmaniasis?

Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease spread by the bite of infected sand flies. It is found in parts of about 88 countries. Most of the countries are in the tropics and subtropics. It is found in Mexico, Central and South America (not Uruguay or Chile), southern Europe, Asia (not Southeast Asia), the Middle East, and Africa (particularly East and North Africa).

There are several different forms of Leishmaniasis. The most common forms are Cutaneous Leishmaniasis, which causes skin sores, and Visceral Leishmaniasis, which affects some internal organs of the body such as the spleen, liver or bone marrow.

What are the signs and symptoms of Cutaneous Leishmaniasis?

People who have Cutaneous Leishmaniasis have one or more sores on their skin that can change in size and appearance over time. If untreated, the sores can last from weeks to years.

- Some sores end up looking somewhat like a volcano, with a raised edge and central crater.
- A scab covers some sores.
- The sores can be painless or painful.
- Some people may have swollen glands near the sores.

You can get Cutaneous Leishmaniasis more than once.

What are the signs and symptoms of Visceral Leishmaniasis?

People who have Visceral Leishmaniasis usually have:

- Fever
- Weight loss
- An enlarged spleen and liver
- Swollen glands
- Abnormal blood tests
 - Low red blood cell count
 - Low white blood cell count
 - Low platelet count

If not treated, Visceral Leishmaniasis can cause death.

How is Leishmaniasis spread?

Leishmaniasis is spread by the bite of infected sand flies.

- It can be spread by blood transfusions.
- It can be spread by sharing contaminated needles.
- Rarely, it can be spread from mother to baby during pregnancy.

Could I get Leishmaniasis in the United States?

Probably not. It is possible but very unlikely that you would get Leishmaniasis in the United States. Very rarely, people living in rural southern Texas have developed skin sores from Cutaneous Leishmaniasis. No cases of Visceral Leishmaniasis are known to have been acquired in the United States.

What are the risk factors for Leishmaniasis?

People can become infected if they live or travel where Leishmaniasis is found and:

- They spend time outside in rural areas from dusk to dawn.
- Insect repellent is not used on exposed skin.
- They sleep in an area that is not well-screened or air-conditioned.
- Living and sleeping areas are not protected with insecticide.
- They are born to an infected mother.
- They receive an infected blood transfusion.
- Although sand flies are primarily nighttime biters, infection can be acquired during the daytime if resting sand flies are disturbed.
- Adventure travelers, missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers, people who do research outdoors at night, and soldiers are examples of people who may have an increased risk for Leishmaniasis.

Can Leishmaniasis be treated and prevented?

Travelers are advised to consult with an infectious disease or tropical medicine specialist for diagnosis and treatment. The relative merits of various treatments can be discussed with the specialist. Physicians may consult with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to obtain information about diagnosis and treatment.

No vaccines or drugs for preventing infections are currently available. Preventive measures for the individual traveler are aimed at reducing contact with sand flies.

- Avoid outdoor activities from dawn to dusk when sand flies are most active.
- Use protective clothing and insect repellent.
- Clothing should cover as much of the body as possible.
- Use bed nets and screens on doors and windows.
- Spray dwellings with insecticide.

How is blood tested for Leishmania?

Blood is not tested for Leishmania.

Should a person with Leishmania donate blood?

NO. Studies show that Leishmania can be transmitted through blood transfusion. People who are diagnosed with Leishmania are permanently deferred from donating blood for others.

What should I do if I am infected with Leishmaniasis?

Donors who have Leishmania should consult with an infectious disease or tropical medicine specialist for diagnosis and treatment. Several steps can be taken to protect your health and the health of others.

DO see a doctor promptly for medical evaluation, even if you do not feel sick, and obtain follow-up testing, additional information and advice on treatment considerations.

DO inform your obstetrician if you are female and pregnant or thinking of having a baby.

DO have your family members tested if you think they could have become infected.

DO NOT donate blood, plasma, bone marrow, or body organs.

You can find more information about Leishmania on the following website:

Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) Division of Parasitic Diseases:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/leishmania>