

# History of Leprosy and Global Status: An Overview

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## DESCRIPTION

Leprosy also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae*. It primarily affects the skin and nerves and can lead to serious disabilities if left untreated. Despite being a disease of ancient times, leprosy still affects millions of people worldwide.

## History of leprosy

Leprosy has been known since ancient times, with evidence of the disease dating back to 600 BC. It is mentioned in various religious texts, including the Bible and the Quran. In the middle Ages, leprosy was considered a punishment from god and those who contracted the disease were shunned by society. In the 19th century, leprosy was recognized as a communicable disease and efforts were made to isolate those infected. In 1873, Norwegian physician Gerhard Armauer Hansen discovered the bacteria responsible for leprosy, which was later named after him. In the early 20th century, drugs were developed that could effectively treat leprosy, leading to a significant reduction in the number of cases worldwide.

## Symptoms

Leprosy primarily affects the skin and nerves, leading to various symptoms such as:

**Skin lesions:** Leprosy can cause discolored, patchy or scaly skin lesions that may be painless.

**Nerve damage:** The disease can also affect the nerves, leading to loss of sensation, weakness or paralysis.

**Eye damage:** In some cases, leprosy can affect the eyes, leading to blindness.

**Thickening of the skin:** Leprosy can cause thickening and enlargement of the nerves and skin, especially in the face and ears.

## Transmission

Leprosy is transmitted through close contact with an infected person. However, the disease is not highly contagious and it is

believed that only a small percentage of people who come into contact with the bacteria actually develop the disease. Leprosy is not spread through casual contact, such as shaking hands or hugging.

## Treatment

Leprosy is treated with a combination of antibiotics, which are highly effective in killing the bacteria. The duration of treatment varies depending on the severity of the disease and can range from 6 months to 2 years. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent the development of serious disabilities and deformities.

## Prevention

Preventing leprosy involves taking simple measures to reduce the risk of infection. These include:

- Avoiding close contact with an infected person.
- Maintaining good hygiene by washing hands regularly with soap and water.
- Covering the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Seeking prompt medical attention if any symptoms of leprosy develop.

## Global status of leprosy

Despite being a curable disease, leprosy still affects millions of people worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were 155,000 new cases of leprosy reported worldwide in 2018. The majority of cases were reported in India, Brazil, and Indonesia. However, the actual number of cases may be higher due to underreporting. In recent years, efforts have been made to eliminate leprosy as a public health problem. In 1991, the WHO launched the Global Leprosy Elimination Program (GLEP) with the goal of reducing the number of leprosy cases to less than 1 case per 10,000 population by 2000. While this target was achieved, leprosy still remains a significant public health concern in many parts of the world.

## CONCLUSION

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease that primarily affects the skin and nerves. Despite being a disease of ancient times, leprosy

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still affects millions of people worldwide, particularly in developing countries. Early diagnosis and treatment with a combination of antibiotics are essential for preventing serious disabilities and deformities. While efforts have been made to eliminate leprosy as a public health problem, the disease remains

a significant concern in many parts of the world. The stigma and discrimination associated with leprosy can further complicate the lives of those affected and their families. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness about leprosy and work towards reducing the social and economic burden of the disease.