

Leishmaniasis Fact Sheet

1. **What is Leishmaniasis?** - Leishmaniasis is a disease caused by several different types of Leishmania parasites. The disease is spread through the bite of infected sand flies. There are two different forms of Leishmaniasis: (1) Cutaneous Leishmaniasis which causes skin sores and (2) Visceral Leishmaniasis that affects internal organs of the body (spleen, liver, bone marrow).

2. Is Leishmaniasis a common disease?

a. It is estimated that there are about 12,000,000 human cases of Leishmaniasis in the world. Each year about 1,500,000 new cases of Cutaneous and 500,000 cases of Visceral Leishmaniasis are reported.

b. While Leishmaniasis is uncommon in the United States, on rare occasions, individuals in rural southern Texas have developed the Cutaneous form of Leishmaniasis.

c. People living in parts of the world where Leishmania parasites are present, and who spend time outdoors, and at night, are at higher risk of acquiring the disease. Some risk groups include military personnel, adventure travelers, Peace Corps personnel, and missionaries.

3. Where could I be exposed to Leishmaniasis?

a. Leishmaniasis is found in more than 88 countries, mostly in tropical and subtropical regions. Leishmaniasis is found in the rain forests in Central and South America and the deserts in West Asia. While the vast majority of Visceral Leishmaniasis cases occur in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sudan, and Brazil, it is also found in Mexico, Central and South America, southern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

b. Leishmaniasis has not been found in Australia or in the Pacific Islands.

4. How can Leishmaniasis be transmitted?

a. Leishmaniasis is usually spread through the bite of sand flies that became infected by biting an infected animal. Sand flies are much smaller than mosquitoes and are most active from dusk to dawn. However, they will bite during the day if disturbed, such as when a person brushes up against the trunk of a tree where sand flies are resting.

b. Rarely, Leishmaniasis is spread from a pregnant woman to her baby.

c. Leishmaniasis also can be spread by blood transfusions or contaminated needles.

5. What are the common symptoms of Leishmaniasis?

a. Cutaneous Leishmaniasis produces one or more sores on the skin. Sores may begin like pimples and, with time, change in size and appearance to resemble a volcanic crater with a raised edge. Sores may hurt, or be covered by a scab. Sores may take months or years to heal, and may produce scars. The disease can spread to the nose or mouth, causing extensive sores and serious disfigurement. New sores may develop, and the parasite may continue to spread years after the original sore heals.

b. The symptoms of Visceral Leishmaniasis include fever, weight loss, an enlarged spleen and liver, swollen lymph glands (nodes?), and low platelet and red and white blood cell counts. Visceral Leishmaniasis is fatal if left untreated.

6. How is Leishmaniasis Diagnosed? – Diagnosis is through microscopic identification of the parasite and subsequent culture on suitable media.

7. Can Leishmaniasis be treated? - There are a variety of effective treatments for Leishmaniasis. These treatments are not widely available in the United States and can be associated with significant side effects; therefore, the disease is best treated by an infectious disease or tropical medicine specialist.

8. How can human Leishmaniasis be prevented? - Protection from sand fly bites is the best way to prevent Leishmaniasis.

a. Avoid being outdoors, particularly from dusk to dawn.

b. Wear long pants, long sleeves, and socks.

c. Use insect repellent liberally. Spray living areas with insecticide.

d. Use a bed net with fine-mesh netting (more than 18 holes/inch) when sleeping.

9. What about Leishmaniasis in animals?

a. Leishmaniasis is most commonly found in dogs. Common symptoms in dogs include skin sores, chapping on the muzzle or footpads, dull coat, loss of stamina, and weight loss. Treatment can be given, but recurrent infections are very likely.

b. To prevent infection, keep dogs indoors one hour before sunset and one hour after dawn during the sand fly season. A vaccine is not available.

10. For more information:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/leishmania/factsht_leishmania.htm

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animal.

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