

LEISHMANIASIS

WHAT IS LEISHMANIASIS?

Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease that is found in parts of the tropics, subtropics and southern Europe. The infection is caused by contact with leishmania parasites which are spread by the bite of infected sand flies.

There are different types of leishmaniasis; the most common forms are cutaneous, which causes skin sores, and visceral, which affects some of the internal organs of the body (e.g. spleen, liver and bone marrow).

INCIDENCE

The number of new cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis a year is thought to be about 1.5 million and approximately 500,000 with visceral leishmaniasis.

SYMPTOMS

- The symptoms of visceral leishmaniasis usually include fever, weight loss and an enlarged spleen and liver and some abnormal blood tests (i.e. low red blood cell, white cell and platelet counts.)
- People with cutaneous leishmaniasis have one or more sores on their skin. These sores can change in size and appearance over time. The sores can be painless or painful. Some people also have swollen glands near the sores.

PREVENTION

There are no vaccines or drugs to prevent leishmaniasis; the best way for travellers to prevent infection is to protect themselves against bites from sand fly bites.

Avoid outdoor activities from dusk to dawn when sand flies are most active:

- Minimise the amount of skin exposed, long-sleeved shirts, pants and socks should be worn.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET, Citriodiol or Picaridin to exposed areas.

When indoors:

- Stay in well screened or air-conditioned areas.
- Spray living/sleeping areas with an insecticide to kill insects
- Use a bed net soaked in permethrin or deltamethrin; tuck it under your mattress.

TREATMENT

Therapy varies depending upon the clinical form of leishmaniasis, the infecting species and the region where infection is acquired. Travellers concerned they have acquired this disease should see their travel medicine clinic or an infectious disease specialist.

More information on Leishmaniasis is available during your pre-travel consultation with Travelvax. Call 1300 360 164 for the location of the clinic nearest to you.