Leprosy (Hansen Disease)

**Agent:** *Mycobacterium leprae* (bacteria)

**Mode of Transmission:** Person-to-person transmission, probably through inhaling respiratory droplets that are released when a person with the disease coughs or sneezes. Transmission can also occur from exposure to nasal secretions from an infected person.

**Signs/Symptoms:** A chronic disease with varying symptoms, including skin lesions (tuberculoid leprosy); discolored, flat spots on the skin (lepromatous leprosy); numbness on affected areas of the skin; eye problems; nasal congestion; nosebleeds; and nerve damage. The bacteria that cause this condition grow very slowly and signs and symptoms may take 2-10 years to appear.

**Prevention:** Early diagnosis and treatment is important. Hand washing when in contact with patients with lepromatous leprosy and disinfection of surfaces contaminated with infectious nasal secretions should be performed until treatment is established.

Two cases of leprosy were reported in Virginia during 2015. Both cases were adult females. One case was a refugee who acquired leprosy while residing in Africa. The second case is thought to have acquired leprosy while residing in India. Both cases were reported from the northwest region of the state. Since 2000, eight cases have been diagnosed in Virginia, averaging less than one case per year for the last five years.