

## **Leprosy (Hansen Disease)**

Agent: *Mycobacterium leprae* (bacteria)

Mode of Transmission: Person-to-person transmission, probably through respiratory droplets from persons with untreated lepromatous disease (those with discolored spots on the skin).

Signs/Symptoms: A chronic disease with varying symptoms, including skin lesions (tuberculoid leprosy); discolored, flat spots on the skin (lepromatous leprosy); 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.

One case of leprosy was reported in Virginia during 2011. It occurred in a young adult female from the northern region. Although the condition was conclusively diagnosed in 2011, the patient reported that symptoms had begun years earlier while she lived in Asia. Since 2000, five cases of leprosy have been diagnosed in Virginia, averaging less than one case per year.