

## **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.

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.

No cases of leprosy were reported in Virginia during 2012. One case was diagnosed in 2011 in a young adult female who had initially developed symptoms years earlier while she lived in Asia. Since 2000, five cases of leprosy have been diagnosed in Virginia, averaging less than one case every two years.