

# Leishmaniasis

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## What is leishmaniasis?

Leishmaniasis is an infection caused by the *Leishmania* parasites

There are three main types:

- cutaneous leishmaniasis
- visceral leishmaniasis
- mucocutaneous

Mammals, including dogs, foxes and rodents and humans are usual reservoirs for leishmaniasis

According to the World Health Organization (WHO)(2021) an estimated 700 000 to 1 million new cases occur annually.

## How is it spread?

It is transmitted by the bite of an infected female sand fly and causes several clinical syndromes in humans.

The sand fly predominantly bites between dusk and dawn and usually stays close to the ground. Sand flies are very small, and their bites can be painless.

In rare cases visceral leishmaniasis has been transmitted from mother to baby or via blood transfusion.

## Where is leishmaniasis found?

In 2019, more than 90% of new cases reported occurred in 10 countries: Brazil, Ethiopia, Eritrea, India, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

- This Eastern Mediterranean region accounts for 80% of the cutaneous leishmaniasis cases worldwide.
- Visceral leishmaniasis is highly endemic in Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan.

WHO (2021)

Sand flies are usually found in forests, the cracks of stone or mud walls, or animal burrows.

Information of the risk of leishmaniasis and rates can also find for travel destinations at [WHO | World Health Organization](https://www.who.int).

[NaTHNaC - Home \(travelhealthpro.org.uk\)](https://travelhealthpro.org.uk)

The incidence of leishmaniasis is also linked to environmental changes such as deforestation and urbanization.

Leishmaniasis risk:

Only a small fraction of those infected by parasites causing leishmaniasis will eventually develop the disease.

International travellers are increasingly involved in adventure travel and outdoor activities, which render them at increased risk of contracting leishmaniasis.

Those who are immuno-compromised are at greater risk of illness with visceral leishmaniasis.

## Signs and Symptoms:

Cutaneous leishmaniasis presents as skin lesions (often an ulcer) that develop weeks or months after infection. If left untreated these sores persist for several weeks to months and can result in scarring.

Visceral leishmaniasis - after an incubation period of weeks or months; life-threatening disease may develop. with symptoms of irregular bouts of fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anaemia. fever, enlarged spleen, and anaemia.

Mucocutaneous leishmaniasis can lead to damage of mucous membranes of the nose, mouth, and throat in varying severity.

**Diagnosis** is made by history of travel and symptoms, along with taking a biopsy sample of the lesion or other tissue sample to identify the parasite.

## Treatment:

Patients should be referred to a specialist tropical disease unit for diagnosis and treatment of leishmaniasis. There are several drug treatments available including oral, topical and injectable medications. These should be discussed with the.

specialist: who will choose treatment according to the type of leishmaniasis

**Prevention:**

There is no vaccine available for leishmaniasis. Travellers are advised of the importance of insect bite avoidance measures in prevention. Such as covering up exposed skin and using a DEET (30%-50%) containing insect repellent, particularly between dusk and dawn.

Sand flies usually stay close to the ground, so sleeping in hammocks may reduce the risk of bites. Sand flies are small enough to pass through a standard mosquito net but are less likely to do so if the net is impregnated with permethrin.

**Speak to your travel health advisor about how to avoid insect bites or see our insect bite avoidance leaflet.**

Further information available at [Leishmaniasis \(who.int\)](http://www.who.int/leishmaniasis)

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