

Leishmaniasis

Leishmaniasis is an infection transmitted by the bite of infected phlebotomine sandfly

Leishmaniasis is an infection caused by the *Leishmania* parasites. The infection is transmitted by the bite of infected phlebotomine sandfly. There are over 20 types of *Leishmania* parasites which cause infection in people and 30 different types of sand flies to spread infection. Leishmaniasis is widely distributed throughout Central and South America, the Middle East, Africa and southern Europe.

There are several different forms of leishmaniasis in people. The most common forms are cutaneous leishmaniasis and visceral leishmaniasis. Leishmaniasis is also present in animals, commonly dogs and rodents.

Cutaneous leishmaniasis occurs when the *Leishmania* parasite infects the skin. It can start with a red sore at the site of the sandfly bite. The sore can then develop into a more prominent nodular lesion, an ulcer and then crust over. In some cases, cutaneous leishmaniasis can spread and may not heal spontaneously.

Visceral leishmaniasis, also known as kala-azar, occurs when the parasite infects several organs, commonly the liver, spleen and bone marrow. It can cause fever and weight loss and people can be very unwell; without treatment it can be potentially fatal. Travellers with conditions and medication which cause immunosuppression are at a greater risk of developing visceral leishmaniasis.

Treatment is usually advised by an infectious disease specialist and depends on many factors, but can involve treatment applied directly to the skin sore or taken as a tablet or injection.

Prevention

Travellers should be aware of the risk of leishmaniasis at the destination to be visited. Information about leishmaniasis risk in affected countries can be found in the 'Outbreaks' and 'Other Risks' section of our [Country Information pages](#).

There is no vaccination or medication to prevent leishmaniasis.

The key to prevention is [insect bite avoidance](#). Sand flies are very small and their bites can be painless. They are most active from dusk till dawn and are commonly found in rural areas, but have also adapted to an urban environment. Sand flies are found closer to ground level so those spending time near or on the ground are at an increased risk of bites.

Resources

- [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: Leishmaniasis FAQs](#)
- [World Health Organization: Leishmaniasis Fact sheet](#)
- [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#)