



Lymphatic filariasis (LF) is a parasitic infection caused by worms (nematodes) that are transmitted by mosquitoes of the genus *Culex* in the Americas. Infection can lead to changes in the lymphatic system and result in chronic lymphedema (tissue swelling) and enlargement of body parts (elephantiasis). The disease causes pain and disability and often brings stigma and social exclusion. In individuals with chronic disease, elevating the affected extremities, good hygiene, and prevention and prompt treatment of skin infections can help manage symptoms of the disease. To interrupt transmission, PAHO/WHO recommends integrated vector control measures coupled with yearly mass administration of two medicines—diethylcarbamazine and albendazole—in a single dose to individuals in endemic areas for at least five consecutive years.

Key facts

- Globally, more than 120 million people are infected with LF, and some 40 million are disabled and/or disfigured by the disease.
- In the Americas, LF is caused exclusively by the parasite *Wuchereria bancrofti* (in other regions, *Brugia malayi* and *B. timori* are also causative agents).
- Some 13.4 million people in the Americas are at risk of infection, 80% of them in Haiti.
- In the Americas, only four countries are endemic for LF: Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Haiti.
- Guyana, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic have all benefited from the global program for the donation of albendazole for mass drug administration.
- Brazil has eliminated LF in six states—Alagoas, Bahia, Maranhão, Pará, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina—leaving a limited focus in the metropolitan area of Recife (in Pernambuco State) as the only active area of LF in the country.

PAHO's response

- In 2009, PAHO/WHO Member States set the target of eliminating LF as a public health problem by 2015.
- PAHO/WHO collaborates with endemic countries to obtain donated medicines and supplies and provides technical support to strengthen prevention and control activities.
- PAHO/WHO monitors and evaluates progress in endemic countries toward interruption and elimination of transmission of LF and provides technical cooperation to strengthen capacity for monitoring and evaluation of LF elimination programs.
- PAHO/WHO supports endemic countries to strengthen capacity for managing cases and preventing disabilities that can result from LF infection.
- PAHO/WHO coordinates these actions through the Secretariat of the Regional Program Group Review for the elimination of LF and helps endemic countries prepare to obtain verification of elimination of the disease.



www.paho.org/WorldHealthDay2014

For more information, visit: www.paho.org/lymphaticfilariasis

