



Leishmaniasis is a vector-borne disease with a broad clinical spectrum and a variety of parasites, reservoirs, and vectors (*Phlebotomus* flies) involved in its transmission. It is directly linked with poverty but is also influenced by environmental and climatic factors. The cutaneous form of the disease causes skin ulcers and can result in disfigurement similar to the effects of leprosy. Mucosal leishmaniasis can partially or totally destroy the mucous membranes of the nose, mouth, and throat cavities and surrounding tissues. The visceral form—the most severe—produces high fever, substantial weight loss, swelling of the spleen and liver, and anemia, and results in death in over 90% of cases if left untreated. Tools for prevention and control are limited, so it is important for exposed individuals to be involved in actions to reduce contact between humans and vectors. Early diagnosis and proper treatment are crucial to improve patients' quality of life.

Key facts

- Globally, more than 12 million people are infected with leishmaniasis, and 350 million are at risk.
- Leishmaniasis overall is endemic in 98 countries and territories, responsible for a burden of disease of 2.35 million DALYs (disability-adjusted life years), of which 2.3% fall within the Americas.
- An estimated 75% of all cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis are concentrated in 10 countries, four of which are in the Americas: Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Nicaragua.
- Brazil is one of six countries in which 90% of cases of visceral leishmaniasis are found (the others are Ethiopia, India, Bangladesh, Sudan, and South Sudan).
- 15 of the 22 species of *Leishmania* that cause disease in humans have been identified in the Americas, and 54 different species of vectors are potentially involved in its transmission.
- In the Americas, an average 60,000 cases of cutaneous and mucosal leishmaniasis and 4,000 cases of visceral leishmaniasis are diagnosed annually, with a fatality rate of 7%.
- Coinfection with *Leishmania* and HIV occurs in 35 countries, increasing the burden of disease due to greater difficulty in clinical management and treatment.

PAHO/WHO response

- In 2007, WHO Member States approved a series of measures to improve prevention, control, and treatment of leishmaniasis in affected countries and called for WHO to raise awareness while also promoting research on the disease and on new and better treatments.
- The PAHO Strategic Fund assists endemic countries in the Americas in purchasing medicines and other necessary supplies for treatment of leishmaniasis.
- PAHO provides training in surveillance, prevention, treatment, and control at the clinical, epidemiologic, and laboratory levels, and produces guides for clinical management of patients, epidemiologic vigilance, and knowledge dissemination.



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