

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease of humans caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae*. For many years, it was considered a mysterious disorder associated with some type of curse, and persons with the disease were isolated and ostracized. Today, there is effective treatment and the disease can be cured. There is no longer any justification for isolating persons with leprosy. There are no closely related diseases. The diagnosis can usually be made by the history and characteristic findings on examination. The important findings are decreased ability to feel light touch in a skin spot, enlarged or tender nerves in the arms or legs, numbness in a hand or foot, and finding the bacteria in the skin. There may also be loss of hair in the affected skin areas. A special type of skin smear is commonly done and will demonstrate the bacteria in the skin in lepromatous and borderline lepromatous cases. The bacteria are too few in tuberculoid cases to be found in a skin smear. A skin biopsy of a lesion can also be helpful to confirm the diagnosis. There are no blood tests or skin tests at the present time that are helpful in the diagnosis.