



July 2011

# Information sheet

Community and Health Services Department



## Leishmaniasis

### What is leishmaniasis?

Leishmaniasis is a parasitic infection of the skin, mucous membranes, or internal organs. Leishmaniasis is found in 88 countries and four continents, including the Americas (Texas to northern Argentina), Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Leishmaniasis is caused by infectious parasites that live inside infected humans, dogs, rodents and other small animals.

### What are the signs and symptoms of leishmaniasis?

**Skin form:** Within weeks to months after being infected, one or more small bumps develop into open or closed skin sores at the site of the bite.

**Mucous membrane form:** Sores are present in the nose, mouth or throat and continue to grow over time. These growing sores can lead to severe disfigurement.

**Internal Organ form:** There may be fever, enlargement of organs (such as the liver and spleen), swelling of lymph nodes, weakness, weight loss and low red blood cell count.

### How does leishmaniasis spread?

Leishmaniasis is transmitted from an infected animal or human to others through the bite of an infected sandfly.

### How is leishmaniasis prevented?

There is no vaccine available against leishmaniasis. The best prevention is to minimize the risk of being bitten by an infected sandfly by following these precautions:

- Avoid outdoor activities from dusk to dawn, when sandflies are most active
- Wear protective clothing when outdoors
- Use an insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin and edges of clothing
- Ensure windows are screened, and use fine-meshed bed nets

### What is the treatment for leishmaniasis?

See your physician upon detection of any symptoms. If left untreated, the disease may become chronic or disfiguring. Infections of the skin may heal by themselves. There are medications available for the other infections, but use of these drugs is prolonged and has unpleasant side effects.

For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**