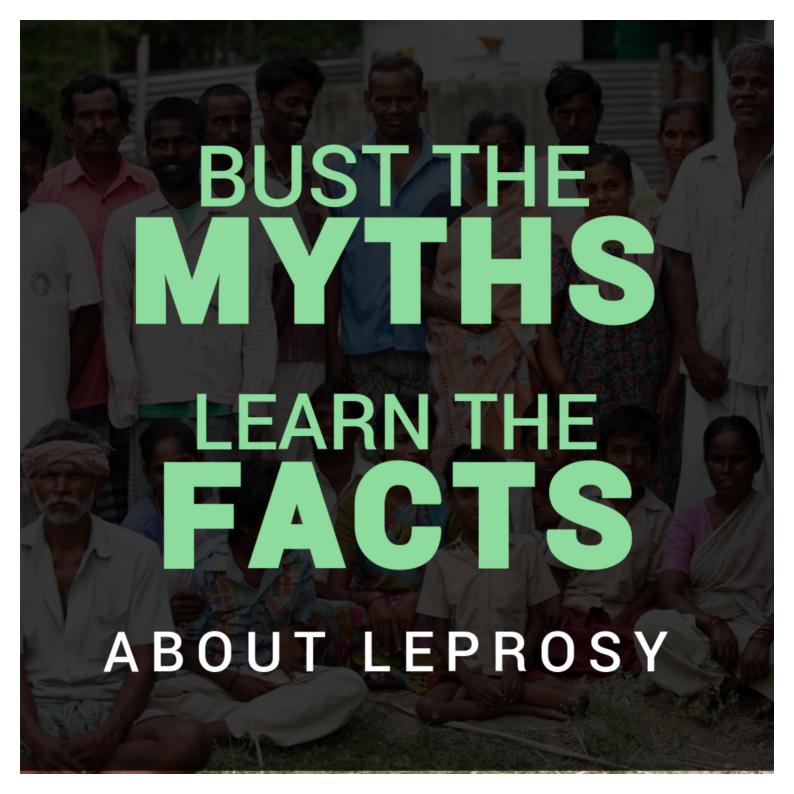


COMMON LEPROSY MYTHS BUSTED



"Leprosy is the result of a curse." "Leprosy cannot be cured." How many of us have grown up hearing this?

But the unfortunate part is, we tend to believe in such myths about leprosy and these myths add to the stigma associated with leprosy.

The stigma of leprosy has serious consequences on both patients and their family members. Because of stigma, patients do not come early for treatment resulting in disabilities and transmission of the disease. Stigma also affects various aspects of life, such as social status, employment opportunities or jobs, marriage and family life.

For this reason, clearing up the myths and misconceptions about leprosy is crucial in our fight against leprosy.

Here, we bring you a small primer on some of the basic facts about leprosy in our effort to dispel the myths associated with leprosy.

MYTH: Leprosy is a disease of the past, completely eradicated.

FACT: Leprosy is not eradicated so far.

Even today, leprosy is a public health problem with over 200,000 cases detected in 150 countries.



MYTH: Leprosy is the result of a sin or curse, or immoral behaviour.

FACT: Leprosy is caused by a slow-growing bacterium, Mycobacterium leprae, and is not the result of a sin or curse, or immoral behaviour.

MYTH: Leprosy is hereditary.

FACT: Leprosy is not hereditary. There is no medical evidence to show that leprosy is transmitted congenitally to the offspring of an infected mother.

MYTH: Leprosy is very contagious (easy to catch).

FACT: Leprosy is one of the least contagious diseases. In fact, 95% of adults cannot catch it because their immune system can fight off the bacteria that cause leprosy.



MYTH: Leprosy is not curable.

FACT: Leprosy is completely curable with multidrug therapy (MDT), a combination of three antibiotics – rifampicin, clofazimine and dapsone. Treatment period ranges from 6 to 12 months.

MYTH: You can get leprosy when sitting next to someone who has the disease.

FACT: You cannot get leprosy through casual contact, like shaking hands or playing together or sitting next to someone who has the disease.

MYTH: Leprosy causes the fingers and toes to fall off.

FACT: Fingers and toes do not 'fall off' due to leprosy. In advanced stages, the bacteria that cause leprosy attacks the nerves of the fingers and toes and causes them to become numb. Injuries and infection of numb areas can cause the bones to shorten. The tissues around them shrink, making them short.

MYTH: Patients with leprosy need to be isolated.

FACT: Patients with leprosy, taking multidrug therapy (MDT) do not spread the disease. A patient becomes non-infectious within one week, most often, after the very first dose of treatment.

MYTH: Persons affected by leprosy cannot lead a normal life.

FACT: Persons affected by leprosy can lead normal and dignified lives like any other person. They can marry, have children, continue to attend work or school.





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