

Leprosy

is not

a thing of

the past

but

it should be!

## A NOTE TO TEACHERS:

The following information is meant to give your students a basic understanding of what leprosy is and how they are transforming lives by participating in Cured not Cursed. Following the list of questions we are frequently asked, we turned the tables with some discussion questions to challenge your students. Please refer to [www.cureleprosy.ca](http://www.cureleprosy.ca) for additional information and do not hesitate to contact the Mission directly if you should need anything else.

Thank you for your participation and HAVE FUN!

## GET THE FACTS!

### WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT LEPROSY?

First off, leprosy still exists and is a big problem in many countries. In Canada, cases of leprosy are extremely rare, but in places such as Bangladesh, India or Nigeria, people live in fear of it. In fact, in the year 2000, there were still 91 countries in the world that had reported cases of leprosy. That is why we value your support in eliminating this disease.

### WHAT IS LEPROSY?

Good Question. Leprosy is a disease that affects men and women, boys and girls alike. The *Mycobacterium leprae* bacterium, which causes leprosy, attacks the nervous system in the body. This results in variety of physical problems in those affected. Even though a cure has been found, it is not always available. When unavailable, the results are devastating.

Leprosy starts by attacking and destroying the nerves in the cooler parts of the body like the hands, feet and face. Patches of skin become discoloured and lose their sensation to pain as the nervous system breaks down. When left untreated, leprosy can also affect the eyes – and can even cause blindness.

These symptoms do not only create difficulties in day-to-day tasks, it prevents adults from working and earning enough to live and support their families. For children, a diagnosis of leprosy often spells the end to their schooling forever!

## IS LEPROSY CONTAGIOUS?

Yes and no. Leprosy passes from one person to another through prolonged exposure. Tiny droplets of nasal fluid or saliva from coughing and sneezing can cause someone to spread the disease. However, up to 95% of the world's population is naturally immune to the disease.

## WHY ARE PEOPLE WITH LEPROSY REJECTED?

People still fear this disease because they don't understand it can be cured! Many communities still believe a person has been cursed or has committed an unforgivable offense and leprosy is their punishment. Of course, neither belief is true.

Imagine being rejected by your friends and family because of an illness that you yourself don't understand.

With horrific physical affects and equally



damaging emotional rejection, it is no wonder that people with leprosy often feel hopeless and abandoned.

**IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR PEOPLE WITH LEPROSY?**

Yes! There is hope, because there is a cure. In 1982, three drugs were discovered to work together and stop the bacteria that cause leprosy. This Multi-Drug Therapy has the potential to save thousands of people from the strife of having to live with leprosy.



**IF THERE IS A CURE, DOES THAT MEAN EVERYONE IS CURED?**

Not exactly. Though the cost of the Multi Drug Therapy medication is generously covered by the Novartis Foundation, it is not always easy to access. Many people live in remote areas of the countryside, far from a hospital. Also, because of the fear of rejection, people they ignore their symptoms instead of seeking treatment.

Sadly, many governments do not accurately report the number of people suffering from leprosy. Many countries have stopped actively looking for the disease and their health care workers are not trained to recognize the tell-tale symptoms of leprosy. So while the World Health Organization declares that leprosy is no longer a health concern, the Leprosy Mission is hesitant to participate in such celebrations.

## IS LEPROSY LIFE THREATENING?

No – leprosy is not a terminal illness. However, it can cause permanent disabilities and a devastating stigma that can make difficult for those with this disease. Many people are rejected by their family and communities – this is why leprosy is sometimes called, “the living death”.

Leprosy causes simple tasks like taking a pot off the stove to result in bad burns and the person is not even aware they've been burnt! Because leprosy anesthetizes parts of the body, when people injure themselves, they feel no pain. Even walking down the street can be dangerous— if they step on something that cuts their foot, they may not even notice!

Often, because these types of injuries cause no pain, they are left untreated. But this can lead to infections and permanent damage.

Additionally, when leprosy enters the feet or hands, fingers and toes can start to claw up. The person loses the ability to grab things. Feet can become so deformed it is impossible for them to even walk. Can you imagine not being able to hold a pen or a fork? Sadly, these deformities are sometimes irreversible and amputation is the only option.



## WHO IS HELPING TO BRING THE CURE TO THE PEOPLE?

For over 100 years, far before the cure for leprosy was discovered, The Leprosy Mission Canada has been working to help people suffering from the disease. Much has changed in the span of 100 years, but there is still much to do.

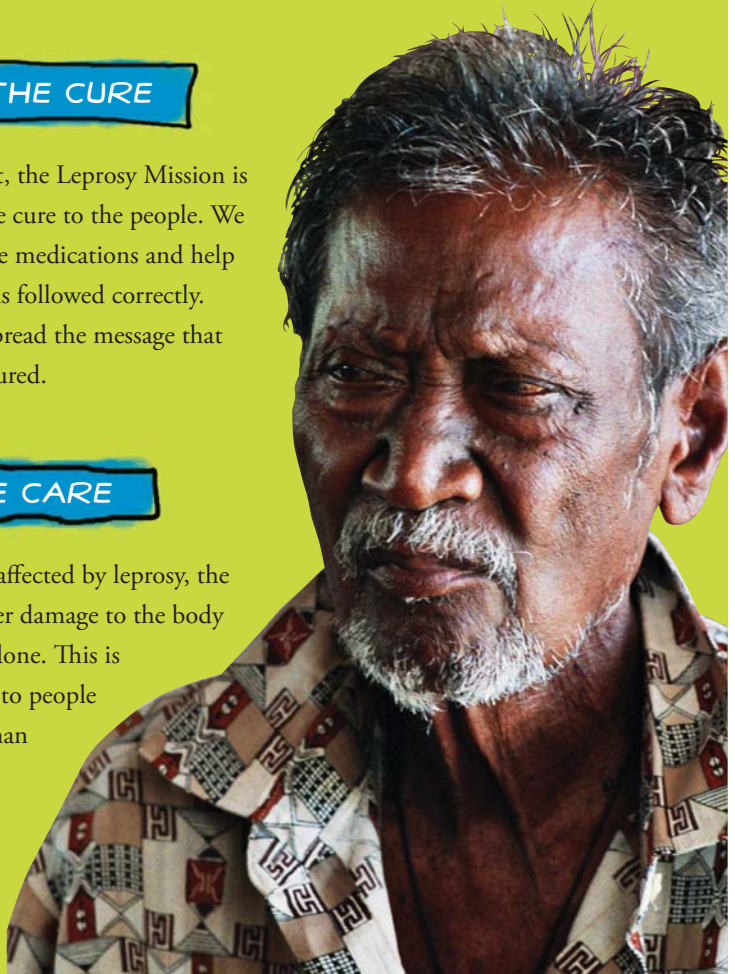
Today the Leprosy Mission offers the cure and ongoing care to meet the different needs of people with leprosy.

## SHARING THE CURE

First and foremost, the Leprosy Mission is trying to bring the cure to the people. We will administer the medications and help ensure treatment is followed correctly. We continue to spread the message that leprosy must be cured.

## GIVING THE CARE

For many people affected by leprosy, the cure has come after damage to the body has already been done. This is why we offer care to people who need more than just a cure.



For some, the Leprosy Mission provides reconstructive surgery on their hands or feet. Others are fitted with prosthetic limbs where amputation has taken place. Rehabilitation is crucial in allowing people to live normal and productive lives after leprosy.

## LAUNCHING THE FUTURE

People affected by leprosy are often in need of more than just physical support. Children with leprosy have missed many days, perhaps years of school. Adults are in need of training and assistance to start new careers.

The Leprosy Mission gives people with leprosy a new life. By offering education and training programs, as well as small loans to start businesses, we hope that people with leprosy can go on to live an independent life, free from the constraints of leprosy.

## BREAKING THE STEREOTYPES

Part of our work involves breaking down the stigmas attached to leprosy. By taking away the fear of the disease through education and awareness we hope people with leprosy can gain acceptance from their family and community.

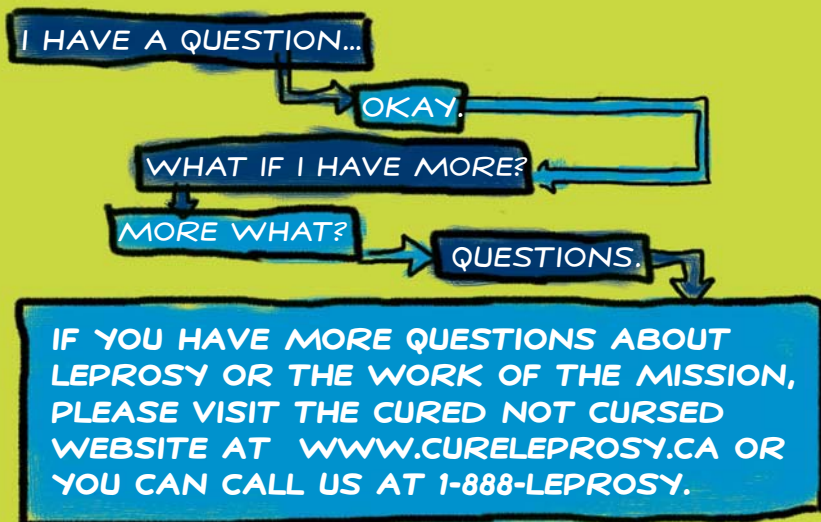
## WHERE DOES THE LEPROSY MISSION WORK?

The Leprosy Mission Canada works primarily in three areas: Bangladesh, India, Nigeria. Within these countries we have several different hospitals and support groups to heal people in all areas – physically, spiritually and emotionally. For a complete listing of all the areas around the world where the Leprosy Mission works, please visit the Mission's website ([www.leprosy.ca](http://www.leprosy.ca)).

# LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

We'd like to ask you some questions now that you can discuss among your group. The more we all talk together about leprosy... the more this disease can become a thing of the past!

- What do you think are the first reactions when people are diagnosed with leprosy? How would you feel?
- Why do you think the governments in some countries try not to reveal the truth about how many people have leprosy?
- What can be done to breakdown the hatred and rejection felt by people with leprosy?
- Work with your team to locate the names of cities and hospitals where the Leprosy Mission works. (Hint: check out our website at [www.leprosy.ca](http://www.leprosy.ca))
- What can you do to help cure and care for people with leprosy?  
PARTICIPATE IN CURED NOT CURSED!



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