



World Leprosy Day

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World Leprosy Day is observed on the **last Sunday of January**, seeks to increase public awareness about leprosy and focuses on the target of zero cases of leprosy-related disabilities in children.

- This year's theme for World Leprosy Day is '**ending discrimination, stigma, and prejudice**'.
- In **India, it is celebrated on the 30th January each year** to commemorate the **death of Mahatma Gandhi**. This day was chosen as a tribute to the life of Gandhi who had a lifelong compassion for people affected by leprosy.
- Recently, **Shri Yohei Sasakawa** has been awarded **Gandhi Peace Prize** for the year 2018 for his contribution in Leprosy Eradication in India and across the world.
- In India, though we **achieved leprosy elimination** (<1 new leprosy case per 10,000 population) in 2005, 60% of the world's leprosy patients are in our country.
- Further, a sample survey for leprosy conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in 2008-2011 estimated that there may be 2,50,000 new cases every year.

Steps Taken to Eliminate Leprosy

- In 2017, government launched nationwide **Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC)** which aims at communicating the importance of early detection and treatment of leprosy.
- **National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP)**: It focuses on both prevention and cure, especially in endemic regions. A Leprosy Case Detection Campaign was launched in March 2016, involving house-to-house screening and referral of patients for diagnosis.
- Introduction of an **indigenously developed vaccine** for leprosy into the **National Leprosy Elimination Programme (NLEP)**. The vaccine, known as **Mycobacterium indicus pranii (MIP)**, has been developed by **National Institute of Immunology**. This vaccine will be administered as a preventive measure to those staying in close

contact with leprosy patients.

- Indian research contributed to the development of **Multi-Drug Therapy or MDT**, now recommended by WHO, which led to the shortening of treatment and higher cure rates.
- **Removal of social stigma:** The fight against leprosy has to be measured against sensitivity displayed by society. Removal of the stigma is vital. More than laws, our attitude to leprosy has to change, doing away with discrimination.

Leprosy

- **Leprosy (Hansen's disease)** is an infectious disease caused by **Mycobacterium leprae** that involves the **skin and peripheral nerves**. The disease mainly affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract and eyes.
- While the mode of transmission of leprosy is not known, the most widely held belief is that the disease was transmitted by contact between those with leprosy and healthy persons.
- More recently, the possibility of transmission by the respiratory route is gaining ground. There are also other possibilities such as transmission through insects which cannot be completely ruled out.
- Although leprosy affects both sexes, in most parts of the world males are affected more frequently than females, often in the ratio of 2:1, according to WHO's Global Leprosy Report.
- Leprosy is **curable with MDT (multi drug therapy)** and treatment in the early stages can prevent disability. The disease is not hereditary, leprosy does not transmit from parents to children.