

## Brazil Plans to Lower Rate of Leprosy to Less than 1 in 10,000, But Not Before 2010

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By 2010 the Ministry of Health hopes to attain an index of less than one case of Hansen's disease for every ten thousand members of the population. This goal will require turning the country's current situation around.

The health system identified 38,410 cases last year, and the index currently stands at 1.48 cases per 10,000. The Ministry's planning is based on recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO), which defines elimination of the disease as less than one case per 10,000 people

Wednesday, March 8, in Brasília, Jarbas Barbosa, the Ministry's Secretary of Health Surveillance, presented the Plan for the Elimination of Hansen's Disease better known as leprosy by 2010, which outlines strategies for the country to achieve the goal of less than one case per 10,000.

"We are launching the 2006/2010 plan, because by 2010 we want each state and municipality in the country to have an index of less than one case for each ten thousand members of the population," Barbosa commented.

The Northeast and the Center-West are the regions with the highest indices of Hansen's disease. The secretary attributes this situation to difficulties in access to treatment centers and lack of information.

Leprosy is an infectious and contagious infirmity caused by bacilli. It is not hereditary, and its course depends upon the characteristics of the victim's immunological system.

The main symptoms are: numbness in the tips of the hands and feet, white and reddish spots anywhere in the body, generally with diminished sensitiveness to heat, cold, pain, and touch, and loss of muscle strength.

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