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Springdale

## AR Dept of Health debunks leprosy fears

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SPRINGDALE - The Arkansas Department of Health in Little Rock says some Northwest Arkansas doctors have wrong information that's leading them to fears of leprosy cases.

The health department tells 5News because leprosy is such a rare disease, some Arkansas doctors often don't have the most up-to-date information on it.

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The health department says some doctors have incorrect information to begin with.

Thursday, Springdale Doctor Jennifer Bingham told 5News there were nine cases of leprosy in the Springdale Marshallese population.

Those cases are not new. In fact, the health department has been tracking them for the last two to three years.

Dr. Bingham contends people should be very concerned about contracting the disease. But the Arkansas Department of Health says: not true.

Officials argue there should be no cause for concern about a leprosy outbreak or epidemic in Northwest Arkansas.

Dr. James Phillips, an infectious disease expert with the Arkansas Department of Health, says only five percent of the population is susceptible to the disease. He says leprosy is not as contagious as a lot of people think it is.

"I think the problem is that very few physicians have had contact or experience dealing, seeing, or dealing with leprosy because it's not a very common disorder in the United States or in Arkansas. And so they haven't had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the most up-to-date information," Dr. Phillips told 5News reporter Mary Marsh on Friday.

"The conception is that it's a very contagious disorder, but that turns out not to be true. And then as we learn more about the genetics involved, we understand that only a small percentage, only 5% of the population are susceptible," says Phillips.

Dr. Phillips says the latest medical information shows only five percent of the population is susceptible to leprosy, which is typically spread through close contact with mucous or other bodily fluids, over a long period of time.

Because of these reasons, the health department wants to correct misinformed doctors, or concerned citizens, to say: a leprosy epidemic cannot occur.

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