

Leprosy case at Australian immigration centre

June 10 2011

A rare case of leprosy has been detected at an Australian immigration detention centre, officials said Friday, but it was not believed to be infectious.

An inmate at Sydney's Villawood detention centre was receiving treatment for the skin disease which is gradually being eradicated around the world, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship said.

"New South Wales Health has advised that the person poses little to no risk to other detainees or staff and that his disease is easily treated with antibiotics," a spokesman said.

"We are advised that people who have occasional contact with an infected person are not at risk of acquiring the disease as it is not easily transmitted from one person to another."

The department said it had been advised there was no need to move or isolate the detainee but, as a precaution, anyone who has had contact with him could be assessed.

[Leprosy](#), which is curable, is an uncommon infection which exists in tropical and sub-tropical regions but is extremely rare in Australia.

If untreated, the disease can lead to [nerve damage](#), including loss of sensation and sweating in the extremities, and muscle paralysis in the hands, feet and face, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) says.

Australian detention centres are under pressure due to an influx of more than 6,000 boatpeople in 2010, leading to criticism that they are overcrowded and conditions unsatisfactory.

Villawood was the scene of riots in April with three [asylum seekers](#) staging a rooftop protest over their visa applications that lasted more than a week.

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