Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease that causes inflammation of various parts of the body, including the skin, joints, blood vessels, and internal organs. It is a disease of the immune system, where the body's defenses mistakenly attack its own healthy tissues. Lupus is not contagious; it cannot be caught from someone who has lupus nor can it be transmitted through contact such as hugging or shaking hands.

Signs and symptoms of lupus can vary greatly in intensity and severity, and some of the most common symptoms include:

- Joint pain
- Fatigue
- Butterfly rash on the face
- Skin rash
- Oral ulcers
- Hair loss
- Mouth and nose sores
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Problems with the heart or lungs
- Numbness or tingling in the hands and feet

Prevalence

Lupus affects approximately 100,000 people in the United States, with more than 5 million people worldwide suffering from lupus. According to the Lupus Foundation of America, 1 in 3 people (31%) feel ‘uncomfortable’ with someone on a bus, 18% with someone who has lupus, and 23% with someone who has lupus sitting next to them on a bus.

A need for better education...

Despite the number of people affected, only 36% of respondents believe that lupus is a common disease, and 36% of respondents do not know what factors may contribute to someone developing lupus. Among the most significant misconceptions about lupus are:

- 47% believe that lupus stems from lack of vitamins and nutrients
- 44% believe that lupus can be cured
- 47% believe that lupus is caused by bad luck

Although there is no definitive way to know whether you have lupus, symptoms such as joint pain, fatigue, and skin rash can be indicative of the disease. Demonstrating that better education around the signs and symptoms of the disease is needed for more effective diagnosis, treatment, and management of lupus.

Findings from a global survey...

- 16,911 people surveyed across 16 countries
- 36% of respondents believe lupus is a disease
- 51% of respondents believe that lupus can vary greatly in intensity and severity
- 13% of respondents believe that having environmental factors contributes to someone developing lupus
- 36% of respondents believe that lupus is contagious

Lupus Foundation of America: Available at: http://www.lupus.org/about/statistics-on-lupus. Last accessed April 2016


Lupus is not contagious, not even through sexual contact. You cannot ‘catch’ lupus from someone or ‘give’ lupus to someone. Despite this, it is a disease that affects millions of people worldwide. It is important to understand the signs and symptoms, as well as the misconceptions, to better educate and support those affected by lupus.