Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease in which the immune system sees the body's healthy cells as foreign invaders and attacks them, causing inflammation and harm to the affected organs. The most common type, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), affects about 204,000 US adults. Anyone can develop SLE, but it is more common in Black and Latina women and women of childbearing age (15–44 years).

The causes of SLE are unknown but are thought to be related to genetic, environmental, and hormonal factors. SLE is hard to diagnose because the symptoms are often mistaken for those of other diseases. Symptoms range from mild to severe, the most common being fatigue, skin rashes, fevers, and pain or swelling in the joints.

There is no cure for SLE, but symptoms can be managed. Treatment calms the immune system to prevent periods of increased SLE symptoms called “flares” and reduce or prevent joint and organ damage. Early diagnosis, effective treatments, and taking medicines as directed can help reduce the damaging effects of SLE. CDC conducts disease tracking research and supports programs to improve care and quality of life for people with SLE.

Measuring How Many People Have Lupus

SLE is rare and hard to diagnose, so CDC funded lupus registries to count the number of children and adults with the disease and understand their characteristics. Results from the registries show that women are 8 times more likely than men to have SLE. Among women, Black women are 3.3 to 4.2 times more likely and Latina women are 1.6 to 2.2 times more likely to have SLE compared with White women.

Studying Lupus to Find Effective Treatments

CDC funds five long-term studies of adults and children with lupus. These studies monitor symptoms over time, the effectiveness of treatments, use of the health care system, development of other conditions, risk factors, and the effects of lupus on important life activities. Data collected guide decisions about the best ways to diagnose, treat, and manage lupus.
Promoting National Partnerships

CDC funds the Lupus Foundation of America and the American College of Rheumatology to raise awareness about lupus and improve knowledge and skills among providers and self-management skills among patients.

Raising Awareness About Lupus

- Online information is available on SLE signs, symptoms and diagnosis, lupus care and self-management, and lupus resources.
- Be Fierce, Take Control, is a campaign that raises awareness and knowledge of lupus symptoms in Black and Latina women aged 18 to 25 to help with early diagnosis.
- Understanding Lupus is a bilingual training program for promotoras (Latina community health workers) to increase awareness and understanding of SLE signs and symptoms in Latino communities.
- Playbook Project is a step-by-step guide for community and student organizations with a campaign and detailed activities to spread key awareness messages about SLE.
- Nurses in K–12 schools are trained to care for students with SLE and support the shift from pediatric to adult care.

Enhancing Self-Management Skills

- Strategies to Embrace Living with Lupus Fearlessly (SELF) is an online program that teaches people with SLE how to work with their health care team and manage symptoms, stress, and medicines.
- Take Charge, an educational email series, and The Expert Series, an online educational video series, are used to help adults newly diagnosed with lupus learn lupus care and self-management skills.
- Self-management education resources support better disease management, provider-patient communication, and quality of life.

Improving Health Care Providers’ Knowledge and Skills

- CDC’s partners are also:
  - Educating non-rheumatology providers who serve American Indian or Alaska Native populations about SLE.
  - Developing continuing medical education courses to teach health care providers how to recognize, diagnose, and treat SLE.
- The Small Groups Project and the Rheumatology Fellows Project are connecting rural health care providers and rheumatologists to promote early diagnosis of SLE and improve care.

Developing a Blueprint for Public Health Strategies

The 2015 National Public Health Agenda for Lupus is a blueprint for the types of partnerships and actions needed to help understand and treat SLE and reduce serious complications.