

Malaria

What is Malaria?

Malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease. It is caused by a parasite and spreads to humans through the bite of infected Anopheles mosquitoes. These mosquitoes usually bite at night between dusk and dawn.

Malaria occurs in more than 100 countries worldwide. Malaria caused an estimated 207 million infections and 627,000 deaths worldwide in 2012, according to the World Health Organization. Malaria transmission occurs in large areas of Africa, Central & South America, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the South Pacific, and parts of the Caribbean.

Who is at risk, and when?

All travellers are at risk in areas where malaria occurs. The risk is highest between dusk and dawn, when Anopheles mosquitoes feed on humans. The risk is higher if you are spending time outdoors during the peak biting time or are sleeping outside without any protection such as mosquito netting.

What can travellers do to prevent malaria?

There is no vaccine to prevent malaria. Malaria can usually be prevented by taking anti-malarial medications and using personal protection measures against mosquito bites. Take your anti-malarial medication exactly as directed by your doctor and pharmacist.

Travellers need to start taking anti-malarial medication before entering a malaria risk area. They must continue to take it while in the risk area and for a time after leaving the area. Be sure to seek travel health advice each time you travel, as anti-malarial drug recommendations may change.

What are the symptoms of malaria?

Symptoms can develop between 6 days to several months after exposure to the parasite. Symptoms may include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, vomiting, diarrhea, and jaundice (yellow colouring of the skin and eyes). Symptoms are often similar to the flu. Malaria can cause serious illness and even death. Travellers who have symptoms of malaria should seek medical assistance as soon as possible.

How is malaria treated?

Malaria can be treated effectively early in the course of the disease with medications. Delay of medical treatment can have serious or even fatal effects. Travellers do not usually need to carry treatment drugs unless they are in an area where access to medical care takes more than 24 hours. In this situation it is recommended that travellers take medication with them and have a self-treatment plan. The treatment drug should not be the same as the prevention drug.

Tips for preventing mosquito bites

1. Cover up! Wear light-coloured clothing that covers most of your body, including long sleeves and long pants. Wear shoes and socks to help protect your ankles and feet.
2. Use insect repellent! Use insect repellent with DEET or picardin. Higher percentages of active ingredients provide longer protection. Repellents containing both DEET and picardin can be used on children older than 2 months. Repellents containing both DEET and picardin can be used during pregnancy and breastfeeding but should not be put on the abdomen (stomach) or nipple area. If you are using sunscreen, apply the sunscreen first and then apply the insect repellent.
3. Sleep safe! Stay and sleep in a well-screened or completely enclosed air-conditioned room. Use a bed net if the area that you are sleeping in is exposed to the outdoors. Follow directions to set up the bed net properly. Make sure it doesn't have any tears. The bed net should not touch you because you can be bitten through the net.
4. Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn! You are most at risk during this peak feeding time for the Anopheles mosquito.
5. Avoid scents! Use personal care products and sunscreens that are unscented.

Visit these websites for more information:

- › www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/malaria
- › <http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/diseases/malaria>

Looking for more health information? Visit www.publichealth.gc.ca

Nova Scotia Health Authority www.nshealth.ca

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