

Malaria

Minor Ailment

What is Malaria?

Malaria is a disease caused by a malaria parasite called *Plasmodium*. There are five species of *Plasmodium* and any of these can cause malaria. It spreads to humans commonly through the bite of an infected female Anopheles mosquito.

Although uncommon, malaria can also spread through

- Pregnancy: from mother to the unborn child
- Transfusion of blood infected with malaria
- Contact with an infected person's blood e.g. through sharing of hypodermic needles by drug abusers

The disease is found most often in tropical countries, particularly in the less developed areas. In some countries, the city areas might be free from malaria while it might be common in other parts of the country.

The risk of infection for travellers will be different depending on the area within the country they will be travelling to and the types of activities they will be doing.

What are the symptoms of malaria?

The symptoms of this condition can include the following:

- High fever (more than 38.5°C)
- Chills with uncontrollable shivering and excessive sweating
- Headache
- Muscle ache
- Tiredness or weakness
- Jaundice (yellow eyes and skin) in some cases
- Confusion / coma

Malaria symptoms can develop as early as 7 days after you first get exposed to the parasite. It can also develop as late as a few months after you leave the area where malaria is present.

Hence, it is important to know that any illness that happens within one year and especially within three months after you return might be malaria, even if you followed all recommended steps to prevent malaria. If you develop any illness, especially within three

months of your return from your trip, you should see a doctor immediately and inform your doctor that you went to a country where malaria is present.

What can I take to prevent malaria?

Malaria can be prevented in the following ways and you can approach your pharmacist to get the following medication.

- Atovaquone / Proguanil (Malarone®)

Medications to prevent malaria do not offer complete protection and you should still prevent yourself from getting bitten by mosquitoes.

What else can I do to manage this condition?

General protection is the most important step to prevent malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases. As Anopheles mosquitoes are more active at night, the malaria parasite would be passed on to the humans mainly between sunset and sunrise. Therefore, it is important to take steps to reduce contact with mosquitoes, especially during these hours.

Other than using medications to prevent the condition, malaria can also be prevented by the following methods:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long trousers to cover most parts of your body
- Use insect repellents which contain more than 30% DEET (diethyltoluamide) on exposed skin. For children, do not use products that contain more than 30% DEET.
- Do not apply insect repellent to children less than 2 months old. Instead, you can use mosquito nettings over the strollers or baby carrier when you go to areas where your baby may be exposed to mosquitoes
- Burn mosquito coils or hang a mosquito net over your bed when sleeping, making sure the edges are tucked in.
- Spray insecticide where the mosquitoes may rest. Mosquito larvae survive well in clear, slow-flowing streams.
- Avoid going to an area where malaria is common

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