

Malaria FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Malaria?

A: Malaria is a parasitic disease that is transmitted through the bite of an infected female *Anopheles* mosquito. There are four species of malaria parasites that typically infect humans: *Plasmodium falciparum*, *P. vivax*, *P. ovale* and *P. malariae*. A fifth type of malaria that naturally infects non-human primates, *P. knowlesi*, has recently been recognized in humans as being transmitted from animal to human. *P. falciparum* is the type of malaria that is most likely to result in severe infections that, if left untreated, may be fatal. Although malaria is a potentially deadly disease, illness and death from malaria can usually be prevented.

Q: How is malaria transmitted?

A: The most common way to get malaria is to be bitten by an infective female *Anopheles* mosquito. Only *Anopheles* mosquitoes can transmit the malaria parasite. The mosquito becomes infective after feeding from an infected person. When a mosquito bites an infected person, the microscopic malaria parasites enter along with the blood. About one week later, when the mosquito takes another blood meal, the parasites enter the mosquito's saliva and are injected into the person being bitten.

Because the malaria parasite infects red blood cells, malaria can also be transmitted through blood transfusion, organ transplant or the shared use of needles or syringes contaminated with blood. Malaria may also be transmitted from a mother to her child before or during delivery, which is known as congenital malaria.

Q: Is malaria a contagious disease?

A: No. Malaria is not spread from person to person through casual contact, and it cannot be sexually transmitted.

Q: What are the signs and symptoms of malaria?

A: Symptoms of malaria include fever and flu-like illness, chills, headache, muscle aches, and exhaustion. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur. Malaria may cause anemia and jaundice because of the destruction of red blood cells. If the infection is left unchecked, it can become severe and lead to kidney failure, seizures, mental confusion, coma and death.

Q: How quickly will a person exhibit symptoms of malaria after being bitten by an infected mosquito?

A: On average, symptoms begin between 10 days and 4 weeks after infection. Some people exhibit symptoms as early as 7 days after infection to as late as 1 year. Some species of malaria can cause relapses of the disease as late as 5 years post infection.

Q: Is there a treatment for malaria?

A: Yes. Malaria can be treated with prescription drugs. The proper treatment for malaria depends on the type of malaria, where the infection occurred, the age of the patient, whether or not the patient is

pregnant and how sick the patient is at the start of treatment. If you think you have malaria you should see your healthcare provider as soon as possible.

Q: Who is at risk for malaria?

A: Anyone can get malaria. People who live in or visit countries where malaria transmission is present are at risk for catching the disease.

Q: Where in the world does malaria occur?

A: Malaria is typically found in tropical and subtropical countries where there are consistently warmer temperatures. The higher temperatures allow the *Anopheles* mosquitoes to thrive, and the malaria parasites need the warm temperatures to develop inside the mosquito. Malaria occurs in more than 100 countries and territories. Approximately half of the world's population is at risk. Large areas of Africa and South Asia, parts of Central and South America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Oceania are all considered malaria endemic areas. A map of at risk countries can be found at <http://cdc-malaria.ncsa.uiuc.edu/>.

Q: Are there drugs that can prevent malaria?

A: Yes. There are a variety of medications that one can take to prevent malaria. The right one for you depends on a variety of factors, including country of travel, length of travel, age, pregnancy and personal medical history. You should consult with your primary care provider and a travel clinic to decide on the malaria prophylaxis that is right for you. Antimalarial drugs are NOT 100% protective and should be combined with personal protective measures such as using a CDC recommended insect repellent, wearing proper clothing and using an insecticide-treated bednet.

Q: How can I prevent myself from getting malaria?

A: If you are traveling or living in an area where malaria is a problem you can help prevent yourself from becoming ill by:

- Taking provider prescribed antimalarial drugs to kill the parasites
- Avoiding mosquito bites, especially at night and dusk
- Wearing a CDC recommended insect repellent and long sleeve/long pants if spending time outside at night
- Sleeping under bed nets, they are even more effective if they have been treated with insecticide
- Spraying insecticides on your home's walls to kill adult mosquitoes that may come inside

Q: Where can I find more information on malaria?

A: The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have an extensive malaria information website. It can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/index.html>.