

# Travelling Healthy

## Malaria – Risk, Prevention and Cure

### Definition:

Malaria is the world's most common infectious disease. It occurs in many tropical and subtropical countries. It is caused by a microscopic parasite that lives in the gut of the Anopheles mosquito. It is spread to humans by the bite of the female mosquito. There are four types of this parasite: Falciparum, Vivax, Ovale or Malariae. The Malaria caused by the Falciparum is very serious and can lead to death if not treated.

Once infected with the parasite it can take anywhere between seven days to many months before symptoms can occur (the Vivax and Ovale strains can take up to one and two years sometimes). The person may have left the malarious area long before they get symptoms.

Symptoms include fever and 'flu like' symptoms that may come and go, including headache, muscle aches and pains, chills, lethargy and malaise. It can include diarrhoea and vomiting.

### Risk:

The risk of getting malaria varies greatly from country to country, season to season, type of travel and itinerary.

Travellers who stay in urban or resort areas in air-conditioned or well screened hotels are at much less risk than those who take the back roads, stay in lesser quality accommodation and who spend time in rural areas, particularly between dusk and dawn.

### Prevention:

The first line of defence against malaria is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.

The anopheles mosquito is particularly prevalent in rural areas and feeds between dusk and dawn. Like other mosquitoes it breeds in still water. Shady areas pose a greater risk of bites than sunny areas.

Measures taken to avoid being bitten are as follows:

- Avoid rural areas between dusk and dawn.
- Avoid being around water areas in the evening.
- Wear clothes that cover as much of your body as possible. Tuck your top into your trousers, your trousers into your socks. Note: Mosquitoes can bite through some clothing.
- Wear light coloured clothing.
- Apply repellent that contains DEET (Rid) to exposed skin.
- Sleep in screened and/or air-conditioned rooms.
- Use mosquito nets over the bed if the room is not screened, do not sleep next to the net as you can be bitten through the net.
- Only take late afternoon siestas in screened or air-conditioned accommodation or under an effective mosquito net.

- Avoid shady outdoor areas in the late afternoon.
- Use mosquito coils and insect spray if there are mosquitos in the room.
- Before you go, treat mosquito nets, sheets, t-shirts etc., with Permethrin, which markedly improves protection.
- Do not use repellents on wounds or broken skin.
- Avoid perfume and/or strong smelling soaps.

## Medications:

There are a number of different types of medication taken in order to help prevent contracting malaria. None of them are 100% effective.

Medications must also be taken precisely as directed to offer maximum protection.

## Treating Malaria:

Despite all precautions, it is possible to still contract Malaria. Malaria is completely curable if treated early however some types of Malaria can be fatal (Falciparum) if left untreated.

The main symptom to watch for is a fever. If you have a fever over 38°C during or after being in a malarious area, treat it as Malaria.

You must see a doctor urgently. Malaria can be diagnosed by a simple blood test. There are also self-test kits available for travellers.

If you are travelling in high risk areas, and are not able to access medical assistance within two days, presumptive treatment in the form of prescription medication is available.

## Contact Us:

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<http://www.federation.edu.au/health-centre>

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