

# **Malaria: How to Prevent It**

## **What is malaria?**

Malaria is an infection that causes high fevers and chills. It's spread by a type of mosquito that feeds at night. The mosquito carries a parasite that causes malaria. If this mosquito bites you, the parasite can get into your blood. The parasite lays eggs, which develop into more parasites, and they feed on your blood cells until you get very sick. Some people die from malaria.

## **Where is malaria most common?**

Malaria is a health problem in many tropical countries. It's also a problem for people visiting these countries. Your chance of getting malaria is highest when you travel in New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, African countries south of the Sahara Desert and some remote places in southeast Asia. Your chance of getting malaria is a little lower in the Caribbean, in the areas around the Amazon River in South America, in India and in some rural areas of Central America. In many countries in Asia and South America, malaria is only in the countryside. If you travel to these countries, you may not need to take malaria medicine if you stay in the malaria-free big cities or take only day trips outside the cities.

## **How can I protect myself from getting malaria?**

You should do whatever you can to keep from getting mosquito bites. If you can, sleep in a room with screens on the windows and doors. Use a mosquito net over your bed. If possible, spray the net with permethrin (one brand name: Elimite). (Permethrin is a spray that repels mosquitos.) During the evening, wear light-colored clothes with long sleeves. It's important to protect yourself with a bug repellent spray that contains no more than 35% of a chemical called "deet." Try not to go outside after the sun sets.

## **What medicines can I take to prevent malaria?**

If you plan to travel to a country where malaria is common, you'll probably take a medicine that may keep you from getting malaria. This is called "prophylactic" malaria medicine. Remember, however, no medicine can protect you 100%.

Prophylactic malaria medicines require you to start taking the medicine a few days or a week before you leave on your trip. You keep taking the medicine during your trip and after your trip for about 1 to 4 weeks, depending on which medicine you are taking. It's important to keep taking the medicine after your trip because the malaria parasites could still be in your blood. Stopping the medicine too soon could give the parasites an opportunity to grow and make you sick. These medicines have some side effects, and not everyone can take them. Your doctor can tell you which medicine is right for you.

Mefloquine (brand name: Lariam) and atovaquone/proguanil (brand name: Malarone) are two medicines you can take. If you can't take one of these, your doctor might recommend you take doxycycline (brand name: Vibramycin). Doxycycline makes you sunburn easily, so you must wear a hat, long sleeves and sunscreen whenever you're outside during the day. Some people can't take this medicine.

If you're traveling to parts of Central America, Haiti or the Middle East, you may be able to take chloroquine (brand name: Aralen). Again, your doctor can tell you which medicine is right for you.

### **Where can I get more information about malaria and travel?**

To find out about the malaria risk for every country, check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>), or call the CDC at 1-888-232-3299.

If you plan to be in an area where the risk of getting malaria is high, you should contact a travel medicine clinic before you leave home. For a list of travel clinics, call the International Society of Travel Medicine at 1-770-736-7060 or visit its Web site (<http://www.istm.org>).

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This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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