

Malaria Information Sheet

What is Malaria?

Malaria is a serious disease caused by a microscopic parasite that affects red blood cells. There are 4 species that infect humans: *P. falciparum*, *P. vivax*, *P. ovale* and *P. malariae*. After penetrating the skin the parasite travels to the liver, where it remains for a minimum of 8 days and sometimes for many months or years. It then enters the bloodstream, where it invades and destroys the red blood cells.

What are the symptoms?

Malaria is a disease commonly characterized by fever, headache, muscle aches, pain and chills. The fever may recur at 48 to 72 hour intervals. The infected person may develop relapses throughout their life. Only *P. vivax* and *P. ovale* have the potential to cause relapses. The *P. falciparum* species may cause seizures, coma, kidney failure and respiratory failure, which may lead to death. Deaths due to Malaria are preventable.

How does it spread?

Malaria is spread through the bites of infected mosquitoes.

How is Malaria prevented?

Prevent the mosquitoes from biting by following these tips:

- If possible, avoid going out between dusk and dawn. If you must go out at night, wear long sleeves and long pants.
- Apply insect repellent containing N,N-diethyl-m.tolamide (DEET) or dimethylphthalate. The manufacturer's recommendations for use must not be exceeded, particularly with small children and during pregnancy.
- If accommodations allow entry of mosquitoes, use a mosquito net soaked in Premethrin over the bed, with edges tucked in under the mattress. Ensure the netting has no holes.
- Use mosquito spray or burn mosquito coils.
- Avoid perfume; i.e. perfumed shampoo and soaps.
- Anti-Malarial medication must be taken properly. It is usually started 1 week prior to entry into a Malarious zone and continued for 4 weeks after exiting the area. The medication prescribed will depend on your destination. Always follow your doctor's instructions.

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Remember:

- Prevent mosquito bites.
- Take all Anti-Malarial medications as prescribed.
- Malaria is usually easy to treat if diagnosed early.
- If you develop unexplained fever after your trip, see your physician and tell him/her you were in a Malaria zone.