

# Get to know malaria



**Malaria is a preventable and treatable disease which kills up to 3 million people and affects up to 500 million people a year. It is transmitted via the female Anopheles mosquito biting and releasing the malaria parasite into the bloodstream.**

Anyone can get malaria but people who live in malaria areas are most vulnerable. Malaria is not spread from person to person like a cold, and it cannot be sexually transmitted. You can also not get malaria from casual contact with malaria-infected people, such as sitting next to someone who has malaria.

## Symptoms of malaria

Malaria symptoms include fever and flu-like illness, such as shaking, chills, headache, muscle aches, and tiredness. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea may also occur. Malaria may cause anaemia and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Infection with one type of malaria, *Plasmodium falciparum*, if not promptly treated, may cause kidney failure, seizures, mental confusion, coma, and death.

The surest way for you and your doctor to know whether you have malaria is to have a diagnostic test where a drop of your blood is examined under the microscope for the presence of malaria parasites. If you are sick and there is any suspicion of malaria, the test should be performed quickly.

Certain people are more at risk of contracting a more severe form of malaria. They are young children and babies, and pregnant women and the baby they are carrying.

## Prevention and treatment of malaria

There are many effective anti-malarial drugs available. Your doctor will decide on the best drug for you based on your travel plans, medical history, age, drug allergies, pregnancy status, and other health factors. It is important that you finish the course of medication so that you are protected.

Keep mosquitoes from biting you by spraying insecticides on your walls to kill adult mosquitoes that come inside; sleeping under bed nets treated with insecticide; using insect repellent and wearing long-sleeved clothing. In addition, prevent mosquitoes from breeding by removing and emptying containers that have water in them, covering and maintaining standing water like pools, ponds and puddles.

Although malaria is a serious disease, it can be treated and there are steps you can take to reduce your risk of contracting malaria. If you are travelling to a malaria-prone area, remember to allow enough time for the medication you need to take to become effective and for a pharmacy to prepare any special doses of medicine (especially if you need doses for children and infants). Be sure to visit your health-care provider four to six weeks before travel.