

# Malaria



**Malaria is a protozoan parasite that infects different organs and different tissues and takes four different forms. The most common and virulent of which is known as *Plasmodium falciparum*.**

The parasite infects and lives in red blood cells and eventually makes them burst, causing anaemia. Death is either caused by this anaemia or severe malaria, which results in convulsions or coma.

## How is it transmitted?

Malaria is transmitted via the Anopheles mosquito biting and releasing the malaria parasite into the bloodstream. Only the female Anopheles mosquitoes can transmit the parasite.

Anyone can get malaria. Most cases occur in people who live in countries with malaria transmission. People from countries with no malaria can become infected when they travel to a malaria area or through a blood transfusion (although this is very rare). Also, an infected mother can transmit malaria to her infant before or during delivery.

However, malaria is not spread from person to person like a cold or the flu, and it cannot be sexually transmitted. You cannot get malaria from casual contact with malaria-infected people, such as sitting next to someone.

## How do I know I have it?

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

It is very rapidly becoming a severe and life-threatening disease. The surest way for you and your health-care provider 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 without delay.

## Is there treatment for malaria?

There are many effective anti-malarial drugs available. Your health-care provider and you will decide on the best drug for you based on your travel plans, medical history, age, drug allergies, pregnancy status, and other health factors.

However, when you're travelling to a malaria area, you can prevent malaria by keeping mosquitoes from biting you, especially at night, by taking anti-malarial drugs to kill the parasites, spraying insecticides on your walls to kill adult mosquitoes that come inside, sleeping under bed nets - especially effective if they have been treated with insecticide, and using insect repellent and wearing long-sleeved clothing if out of doors at night.

## Conclusion

Malaria is a serious disease, with the worst affected being children and pregnant women in Africa. But this disease can be treated with proper medication. Nevertheless, if you are travelling to a malaria country remember to allow enough time for the drugs to become effective and for a pharmacy to prepare any special doses of medicine (especially doses for children and infants). Visit your health-care provider 4-6 weeks before travel.