

# The facts about malaria



Malaria is a mosquito-borne illness that affects more than 214 million people globally, with an estimated 438 000 people dying as a result every year. However, while malaria is a life-threatening illness, it is also preventable and treatable.

## What is malaria?

Malaria is a disease caused by the *Plasmodium* parasite and transmitted in humans through the bite of an infected female *Anopheles* mosquito. It is found mainly in tropical and sub-tropical climates where this mosquito can survive. Currently, the highest transmission rate of malaria is in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Symptoms

The symptoms of malaria infection usually occur 8-9 days after you are bitten by the infected mosquito. Malaria symptoms are similar to those of flu and include fever, chills, and body aches, as well as headaches, diarrhoea, and vomiting. Initially, these symptoms can be mild and therefore, it is often very difficult to diagnose malaria.

## How to prevent malaria

When you are travelling to a high risk malaria area, avoiding mosquito bites is the best way to protect yourself. There are several ways to do this:

- **Insect repellent sprays and creams.** There are many available that are highly effective in protecting individuals against mosquitos. In particular, insect repellents with DEET have

been found to be effective at preventing mosquito bites.

- **Mosquito nets soaked in insecticides** are also very effective in preventing mosquito bites.
- **Anti-malarial medications** are available that can aid in preventing the contraction of malaria. Consult your doctor for more information.

## Treatment

There are currently several effective medications available for treating malaria. The type of medication prescribed depends on the type of malaria parasite found, the area in which the infection occurred, the age of the individual, the severity of the symptoms and whether the individual is pregnant.

Common medications for this condition include chloroquine, quinine sulfate, and hydroxychloroquine. In severe cases, these drugs can be administered intravenously. The key to successful treatment is early diagnosis of this condition because if left untreated, malaria infection can result in death.

If you start to have any flu-like symptoms upon returning from a high risk malaria area, seek immediate medical attention. Early detection and treatment is key.