



## Travel Guard<sup>®</sup> Health Advisory

### MALARIA

In December 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) released its latest report estimating 212 million cases of malaria. Also, WHO estimated approximately 429,000 deaths caused by malaria globally in 2015. Likewise, in the 2015 report, it was estimated that 3.2 billion people were at risk of malaria while 95 countries have been identified with ongoing malaria transmission. 43 of 54 countries in Africa carry a disproportionately high share of the global malaria burden. Sub-Saharan Africa contributed 88% of the global malaria cases and 90% of deaths in 2015. Children less than 5 years of age are particularly susceptible to infection with 70% of deaths reported coming from this age group. Overall malaria mortality rates have fallen by 60% since 2000.

In 2017, malaria continues to plague most countries in Africa with more outbreaks in Namibia and South Africa in recent months. AIG Travel has managed many cases over the past years, primarily in Asia and Africa. From our experience, the mortality rate for malaria is reduced when the disease is detected early; hence, it is important to be fully aware of the potential exposure to malaria when traveling to these endemic areas.

#### What is Malaria?

Malaria is a potentially fatal tropical disease caused by a parasite known as Plasmodium. It spreads through the bite of an infected female Anopheles mosquito. These mosquitoes are most active between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. There are four parasite species that cause malaria in humans:

- Plasmodium falciparum
- Plasmodium vivax
- Plasmodium malariae
- Plasmodium ovale

Plasmodium falciparum and Plasmodium vivax are the most common, while Plasmodium falciparum is the most deadly. In recent years, some human cases of malaria have also occurred with Plasmodium knowlesi—a species that causes malaria among monkeys and occurs in certain forested areas of Southeast Asia.

The parasites develop in the intestine and salivary glands of the mosquito and can be passed onto humans the next time the mosquito bites. In humans, the parasite travels to the liver via the blood and then out into the bloodstream again, where it invades the red blood corpuscles (the cells that carry oxygen in the blood). Malaria can also be spread through blood transfusions, and the use of infected needles.

#### Symptoms

Typically 7 to 30 days pass between being infected and the onset of the disease. Symptoms include:

- Fever and shivering. The attack begins with fever, with the temperature rising as high as 40°C (104 °F) and falling again over a period of several hours.
- Feeling unwell
- Headaches
- Diarrhea, nausea and vomiting

When the temperature drops, the patient often sweats profusely and feels much better. Further symptoms may occur within a day or two. The symptoms diminish over the course of several weeks if the patient develops the ability to resist the malaria parasite. If proper treatment is given, the fever and parasites may disappear within a few days. If a case develops into severe malaria, the classic symptoms may be coupled

with increased drowsiness and other complications including:

- Low blood pressure (hypotension)
- Kidney failure
- Possible hemorrhage (bleeding)
- Effects on the liver (e.g. infectious jaundice)
- Shock and coma may also develop, and the condition may prove fatal
- Cerebral Malaria
- Anemia

## Prevention of Malaria

Prevention requires A, B, C and D:

- Awareness of risk
- Bite avoidance
- Chemoprophylaxis (taking preventive medicines if you are traveling to or living in a malaria region)
- Diagnosis made promptly with early treatment of an infected case

## Treatment

Early diagnosis and treatment of malaria reduces the disease and prevents deaths. It also contributes to reducing malaria transmission. WHO also recommends that all cases of suspected malaria be confirmed using parasite-based diagnostic testing (either microscopy or rapid diagnostic test) before administering treatment. Results of parasitological confirmation can be available in 15 minutes or less. Treatment solely on the basis of symptoms should only be considered when a parasitological diagnosis is not possible.

## Preventive Medicines Include:

### Mefloquine

- Recommended by the CDC as useful for last minute travelers since the drug starts working one to two days before travel
- Not recommended for people with certain cardiac conditions

### Doxycycline

- Recommended by the CDC as good for last-minute travelers since the drug is started one to two days before travel
- Cannot be used by persons younger than 8 years old

### Atovaquone/ proguanil (Malarone)

- Well-tolerated; side effects uncommon
- Cannot be taken by pregnant women or people with severe renal impairment

### Chloroquine

- Recommended by the CDC as a good choice for long trips because it is taken weekly
- May exacerbate psoriasis

## About AIG Travel and Travel Guard®

AIG Travel has eight strategically located assistance centers worldwide, and all medical cases are monitored and managed from one central online system. Customers are never more than a phone call away from AIG Travel's multi-lingual and multi-cultural 24/7 assistance and medical professionals.

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### Sources:

- <http://www.who.int/malaria/en/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/malaria/>
- <https://malariaworld.org/blog/2017-malaria-avalanche>
- <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/tag/Malaria>

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