

Malaria

FACTSHEET

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What is Malaria?

Malaria is a serious disease caused by a parasite carried by certain mosquitoes.

Who gets Malaria?

People who live or travel to the warm regions of the world, tropical and subtropical countries such as those found in Africa, are at risk of contracting malaria. Malaria is found most frequently in underdeveloped and poor countries where there is no malaria control program. In those countries, children and pregnant women seem more likely to develop malaria. Children with malaria in those countries have the highest death rate from the disease. Rarely, a person in the United States who has not traveled to a high-risk country can still get malaria. This can occur through a blood transfusion from a malaria-infected donor or if a local mosquito bites a malaria-infected person (who acquired the infection in a malaria-risk country) and the mosquito, which is now infected, bites you 1-2 weeks later.

What are the symptoms of Malaria?

The symptoms of malaria include a slowly rising fever of several days duration followed by a shaking chill and rapidly rising temperature, usually accompanied by headache and nausea and ending with profuse sweating. The cycle repeats itself either daily, every other day or every third day. In more serious cases of malaria cough, diarrhea, and respiratory distress may be present.

How is Malaria spread?

The primary method that malaria is spread is through the bite of an infected mosquito. Very rarely, malaria can also be spread through a blood transfusion, organ transplant, or shared use of contaminated needles and syringes. Malaria may also be transmitted from a mother to her unborn baby before or during delivery. Malaria is not spread from person-to-person.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The length of time for symptoms to appear after the infective bite is dependent on the form of malaria. It can be as short as seven days or as long as 30 days after the infective bite. Depending on the type of malaria and where it was acquired it may take several months for symptoms to appear.

Is a person with Malaria contagious?

No, a person with malaria is not contagious. The disease cannot be spread from person-to-person.

How is Malaria treated?

There are many good anti-malarial drugs that can be used to treat malaria. The disease must be treated early, before it becomes so severe and poses a risk to a person's life. Because this is a serious disease the infected person is often hospitalized.

Should a person with Malaria be isolated or excluded from work or school?

No, it is not necessary to isolate or exclude a person with malaria from work or school.

Is there a vaccine for Malaria?

There is currently no malaria vaccine approved for human use.

Can Malaria be prevented?

Malaria can be prevented when traveling to countries with reported malaria by the following:

- Take anti-malarial drugs as prescribed by your health care professional.
- Avoid going out between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes commonly bite.
- Wear light colored clothing, dark colors attract mosquitoes.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and trousers if you must go out at night.
- Use an insect repellent that contains DEET
- Stay in a well constructed and well maintained building in the most developed part of town.
- Use screens over windows and doors. If no screens are available, close them at night.
- If accommodation allows entry of mosquitoes, use a mosquito net over the bed, with edges tucked in under the mattress, and ensure that the net is not torn and that there are no mosquitoes inside it.

Want more information?

Information about malaria and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.

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