



Malaria Prevention

What is Malaria?

Malaria is a very serious disease caused by tiny parasites called plasmodium. These parasites can get into your bloodstream and multiply after you have been bitten by an infected mosquito.

Symptoms of malaria include headache, abdominal (stomach) pain, chills, shaking, fever, and sweats. If left untreated, malaria may cause seizures, anemia, jaundice, heart failure, kidney failure, coma, and even death.

Areas of the world where malaria is a risk include: Africa, South East Asia, South Asia, China, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South Pacific, Oceania, South America, Central America and parts of the Caribbean and Mexico.

People who survive repeated or lengthy episodes of malaria as children will have some immunity to infection. However, this wears off a few years after moving away from an area with risk of malaria. People who move to Canada from at risk areas will require anti-malaria medication when visiting or returning to at risk areas.

How can I protect myself from malaria?

If you travel to an area at risk of malaria, you need to protect yourself before you travel, while you are travelling, and when you return home.

Before travel

At least 6 weeks before you travel, speak with your health care provider or visit a travel health clinic. Ask about the risk of

malaria in the area you plan to visit. If anti-malaria medications are recommended, you will be given a prescription. Some anti-malaria medication should be started at least 1 week before travelling.

Make sure you are aware of the possible side effects of the prescribed anti-malaria medication, and that you know how to take the medication correctly. It is best to take the medication with food and plenty of water to reduce stomach upset. Taking anti-malarial medication doesn't guarantee that you will not get malaria but will reduce your chances of getting seriously ill and dying from malaria.

While travelling

It is important that you take your anti-malaria medication for the entire time you are travelling. If you have side effects from the medication, do not stop taking it without getting advice from a health care professional.

Preventing mosquito bites can reduce your chance of malaria infection by 90 per cent or more by doing the following:

- Wear light coloured clothing, long sleeve shirts, pants, and socks. Treat clothing with an insect repellent, such as permethrin, prior to wearing them. Although permethrin is not available in Canada, travel health clinics can advise you how to purchase permethrin and pre-treated gear before or during your trip.
- When you are outside between dusk and dawn, use insect repellent on all exposed skin. The most effective repellents contain the ingredient DEET. For more

information about how to use insect repellants containing DEET, see [HealthLinkBC File #96 Insect Repellants and DEET](#).

- Products that combine sunscreen and repellent are not recommended. When using sunscreen, apply the repellent 15 to 30 minutes after the sunscreen.
- Burn pyrethroid mosquito/insect coils in the evening in well-ventilated areas.
- Sleep in places with screened windows and doors, or with air conditioning.
- Sleep under a small-mesh mosquito net that has no holes and has been sprayed with an insecticide. Tuck the mosquito net under the mattress before it gets dark each day, or first thing in the morning, to prevent mosquitoes from getting into your bedding. The mosquito net is important if you cannot stop mosquitoes from entering your room.
- Spray insecticidal spray indoors in the evening.
- Use non-perfumed cosmetics and toiletries. Mosquitoes are attracted to scented products.

When you return home

Anti-malaria medication does not prevent mosquito bites, or parasites from getting into your body. Once inside your blood, the parasites multiply. The medication stops the parasites from multiplying.

You must continue to take your anti-malaria medication until it is finished, even after your return to Canada. The length of time depends on which drug you are prescribed, and whether you return home or travel to another destination. If the medication is not

taken for the recommended length of time, the parasites may start to multiply in your blood and make you sick.

Even when taking anti-malaria medication, there is a small chance of developing the illness, sometimes months later. If you develop a fever within 1 year of your return home, or other symptoms such as constant headaches, muscle aches and weakness, vomiting or diarrhea, speak with your health care provider immediately about your travels. Malaria is treatable with early diagnosis and prompt treatment, which can also prevent serious complications.

How can I protect myself from malaria if I am pregnant?

Pregnant women should avoid travel to areas where malaria transmission occurs. If travel cannot be avoided, pregnant women should visit their health care provider or a travel clinic to find out if there is a safe medication. Pregnant women should not take certain anti-malaria medications. There are now medications approved for infants.

Pregnant women and children should also be extra careful to avoid mosquito bites. The effects of malaria are more severe among pregnant women, developing babies, and children. A pregnant woman and her baby with malaria are at higher risk of dying from the disease.

For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #41g The Pregnant Traveller](#) and [HealthLinkBC File #41d Travelling with Children](#).