

## Malaria

### What is malaria?

Malaria is a mosquito-borne disease caused by a parasite called *Plasmodium*. Four different types of *Plasmodium* (*P. falciparum*, *P. vivax*, *P. ovale*, and *P. malariae*) affect humans.

### Who gets malaria?

Anyone can get malaria while visiting or living in an area where the disease is common. Most cases in the U.S. occur in people arriving from tropical or subtropical areas of the world. Worldwide, over 350 million cases of malaria are reported each year. Maps of countries where malaria is common may be found in the current edition of the CDC Health Information for International Travel (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/yellowbook/home-2010.aspx>).

### How is malaria spread?

Malaria is spread by the bite of an infected female *Anopheles* mosquito. A very small portion of infections are spread by transfusion of infected blood.

### What are the symptoms of malaria?

Symptoms vary depending on the type of *Plasmodium* involved, but may include high fever, chills, sweats, and headache. In some cases, the illness can progress to severe anemia, kidney and respiratory failure, coma and death. Some types of malaria cause less severe illness, but if not treated the symptoms can continue for weeks or months with episodes of fever and chills. With some types of malaria, relapses of the disease may occur years after apparently successful treatment.

### How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually appear from 12 to 30 days after the bite of the mosquito, depending on the type of malaria involved. Some strains may not cause symptoms for 10 months or even longer.

### How long can an infected person carry this parasite?

An untreated or inadequately treated person can carry the infection for one to many years depending on the *Plasmodium* type.

### What should I do if I think I have malaria?

Call your healthcare provider immediately.

### **How is malaria diagnosed?**

A provisional diagnosis of malaria may be made using a rapid test for *Plasmodium* antigen. However, examination of a blood smear under a microscope remains the "gold standard" for diagnosis of malaria.

### **What is the treatment for malaria?**

The treatment used depends on the type of malaria and where the disease was acquired. Experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are available to assist physicians in the management of patients with malaria or suspected malaria. Treatment should begin as soon as possible, even if the disease is mild, in order to prevent complications and possible death. Additional information on the diagnosis and treatment of malaria may be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/>

### **If I am treated for malaria, can I get it again?**

Yes.

### **How can malaria be prevented?**

The risk for acquiring malaria can be decreased by use of mosquito repellents, bed nets, screens and protective clothing when travelling or living in areas where malaria is common. Travelers to areas where malaria is common may also be advised to take anti-malaria medications to prevent the disease. Additional information on preventive measures is available <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/yellowbook/home-2010.aspx>, or may be obtained by contacting your local health department.