

MALARIA FACT SHEET

What is malaria?

Malaria is an illness caused by a parasite that infects certain types of mosquitos. It is a serious and sometimes fatal disease.

Who can get malaria?

Anyone. However, most people in the United States who get malaria are new to the country or have traveled to areas where the spread of malaria is common.

Where does malaria occur?

Malaria occurs in many tropical and subtropical countries. The spread of malaria is very common in areas of Africa below the Sahara desert and in South Asia.

How is malaria spread?

A person develops malaria from the bite of a mosquito that is infected with the malaria parasite. The mosquitos that spread malaria bite between sunset and sunrise. Malaria may also be spread from a mother to her unborn baby before or during delivery. Very rarely, malaria can be spread through a blood transfusion or organ transplant. Malaria is not spread from person-to-person.

What are the symptoms of malaria?

Malaria can cause a wide variety of symptoms, ranging from absent or mild symptoms to severe disease. Most people experience a combination of the following symptoms: fever, flu-like illness, chills, sweating, headaches, nausea or vomiting, body aches, and feeling unwell (malaise). Severe malaria occurs when infections are complicated by serious organ failures or abnormalities in the patient's blood or metabolism. Untreated malaria can cause mental confusion, seizures, coma, kidney failure, and death.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin 7–30 days after being bitten by a mosquito that is infected with the malaria parasite.

How is malaria treated?

Treatment of malaria depends on many factors including disease severity, the species of malaria parasite causing the infection, and the part of the world in which you become infected. Visit a health care provider and tell them about your travel history if you develop any illness during or up to one year after you travel. It is important to get treatment for malaria immediately.

How can people protect themselves against malaria?

Visit your health care provider 4–6 weeks before traveling to determine whether you need a prescription for an antimalarial drug. The best way to protect against malaria is to avoid mosquito bites. Anyone traveling to affected areas should take the following steps to avoid mosquito bites:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors
- Use air conditioning if possible, keeping windows closed
- Sleep under a mosquito bed net
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved insect repellents
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated items

Where can I get more information?

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