

Malaria Prevention

Malaria is a life threatening parasitic disease which is transmitted by mosquitoes. Malaria is preventable and curable. Malaria has been brought under control and even eliminated in many parts of Asia, Europe and the Americas. However, there are certain parts of Africa, Asia, Central and South America where malaria is endemic. Malaria is the ninth most common cause of death globally, this is mainly due to poverty as it is easily prevented and treated with proper medication. There are about 100 countries where malaria occurs at present and those traveling to those countries need to take precautions before travel. Precautions include bite avoidance techniques (information on these are available in Whelehans Pharmacy or at www.whelehans.ie) and malaria prevention medication which is available on prescription. Because in recent years, more Irish people have been traveling to more exotic and far flung destinations, malaria cases have risen in Ireland in recent years. Over 200,000 Irish people travel to malaria risk areas every year and it is estimated only 15% of these receive the necessary vaccinations and medication. For this reason, I will discuss malaria prevention, symptoms and treatment.

Prevention

Malaria is transmitted by mosquitoes so when visiting malaria endemic areas it is important to take precautions against getting bitten. I discuss these in another article at www.whelehans.ie. The regular use of insect repellants is essential when visiting these areas. Malaria prevention medication is a must if you are traveling to an area where malaria is endemic. There are different strains of malaria in different parts of the world so you will need to take the recommended malaria tablet for the area you are traveling to. Your pharmacist or GP will advise you on what medication to take depending on what area you are traveling to. Malaria prevention medication is only available on prescription. Vaccines for malaria are underdevelopment but are still not available. Travel to areas with malaria should be avoided when pregnant.

More about malaria prevention medication

Once you are prescribed the recommended malaria medication for the area you are traveling to, there are certain precautions you should take. All malaria medication should be taken for some time before entering the malaria area. This is to ensure you have no adverse reactions before you leave as it will be easier to get an alternative before you leave than when you arrive at your destination. You need to continue taking the malaria prevention medication for up to four weeks (depending on which medication used) after leaving the malaria area. The main malaria prevention medication prescribed are doxycycline 100mg caps (one daily starting 2 days before travel and continuing for four weeks after returning), malarone tablets (one daily starting 1 day before travel and continuing for 7 days after returning), mefloquine 250mg tabs (one weekly starting 1-3 weeks before travel and continuing for four weeks after returning) and chloroquine 250mg tabs (one daily starting one week before travel and continuing for four weeks after returning). The most appropriate regime depends on the person and which region traveled to. As with all medication, there are precautions to be taken when taken these medicines and possible side effects. For example, doxycycline can cause a rash when

you are exposed to the sun, so sun screen is important. Doxycycline should also be swallowed with plenty of fluid to prevent oesophageal irritation. Mefloquine can cause nightmares. Your pharmacist or doctor will advise you on precautions and possible side effects. The risks of not taking outweigh the risks of taking.

What are the symptoms of malaria?

Symptoms include headache, fever, aches/pains, tiredness and shivering. It takes two to three weeks or even longer for the symptoms to appear after getting infected with malaria. The symptoms are often mistaken for the flu. Therefore, if you get these symptoms within a few months of returning from a malaria area, you should visit your doctor immediately. Malaria can make a person critically ill within a matter of hours. Malaria can quickly lead to major complications including bleeding problems and liver or kidney failure.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Diagnosis is made by a blood test. Treatment consists of higher doses of the medication used for its prevention, including malarone and mefloquine. The medication used depends on the strain of malaria involved as many strains are resistant to certain drugs. It is fatal if not treated quickly. Even with treatment, 10-15% of people die from malaria.

Holiday Checklist

If you are not sure what you need to bring with you to ensure a safe and healthy holiday, Whelehan's provide a free holiday checklist. Simply call in store to get your complimentary checklist.

Disclaimer: Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, log on to www.whelehans.ie or dial 04493 34591. You can also e-mail queries to info@whelehans.ie.