

DISCONTINUATION OF MALARIA PROPHYLAXIS

Refer to this document if malaria prophylaxis is discontinued for whatever reason before leaving a malaria area or if no prophylaxis was taken during the time spent in a malaria area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is perfectly acceptable not to take malaria prophylaxis if it is making you sick, or you know it will, or if it may cause side effects with other medications and so on. There are generally two acceptable approaches to malaria - the first is to prevent it by taking medication for the time you are potentially exposed, the second is to be vigilant and pick up symptoms early and treat it early. The general recommendation by experts including the World Health Organization is to use prophylaxis because it is simpler, easier, you don't need to understand background information like this here and don't need diligent follow up and serial testing if you are symptomatic.

But many people living and working in such areas don't use prophylaxis, which as a strategy works better if you are visiting for a short period infrequently. Furthermore some areas carry less risk than others and some times of the year similarly. So although we recommend prophylaxis as first choice, stopping it is reasonable as long as you understand the information below and understand the risks and implications of the two strategies referred to above. If unsure you need to request a personal consultation with one of our doctors to discuss your unique situation.

Malaria symptoms generally appear 10-14 days after the mosquito bite. But symptoms can appear as early as 7 days and as late as 4 weeks after infection so one needs to remain alert to the below symptoms throughout this time. It is generally accepted that if you have had no feverish illness and no symptoms at all and are now beyond four weeks after returning from a malaria area, that you can consider yourself safe and the probability of having contracted malaria so low that it can be effectively ruled out.

The general rule is that if you experience any illness symptoms (especially with a fever) within a four week period after leaving a malaria area, you need to visit your doctor for investigations to rule out malaria.

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES TO TAKE WHILST IN THE MALARIA AREA

Your first line of defence against contracting malaria is to decrease the chances of a mosquito biting you. Mosquitos are most active at dusk and night time so caution needs to be taken during these times.

- Wear long sleeve shirts, long pants and socks after sunset.
- Sleep under a mosquito net at night.
- Use mosquito spray or cream on areas of your skin not covered by clothes.

WHAT SHOULD WE WATCH OUT FOR?

Uncomplicated Milder Malaria Symptoms:

The common picture is a fever along with any of the following:

- Headache
- Body and Joint Pains
- Experiencing cold chills
- Loss of appetite and sometimes abdominal pain
- Diarrhea, nausea and vomiting
- Tiredness and unusual lethargy

The important thing to note about malaria is that it does not always present with a fever. Certainly you need to investigate a fever, but even if you feel unwell without a fever you should consider malaria and get it ruled out

Severe Malaria Symptoms:

Again a fever (often above 39 degrees) is normally present along with any of the following:

- Impaired consciousness
- Anxiety, palpitations and sweating
- Convulsions
- Vomiting after every meal
- Dehydration
- Jaundice
- Dark or no urine
- Muscle weakness
- Pale hands, tongue and inner parts of the eyelid.
- Difficulty breathing

WHEN TO SEEK HELP FROM A DOCTOR

If any of the above symptoms are experienced after being in a malaria area, you need to see a doctor immediately. The purpose is to rule out malaria confidently. Do not wait to see if you get better even if you think that it may just be the flu and even if you are pretty sure you know why you are sick. Take any of the above symptoms extremely seriously after traveling to a malaria area and get it ruled out.

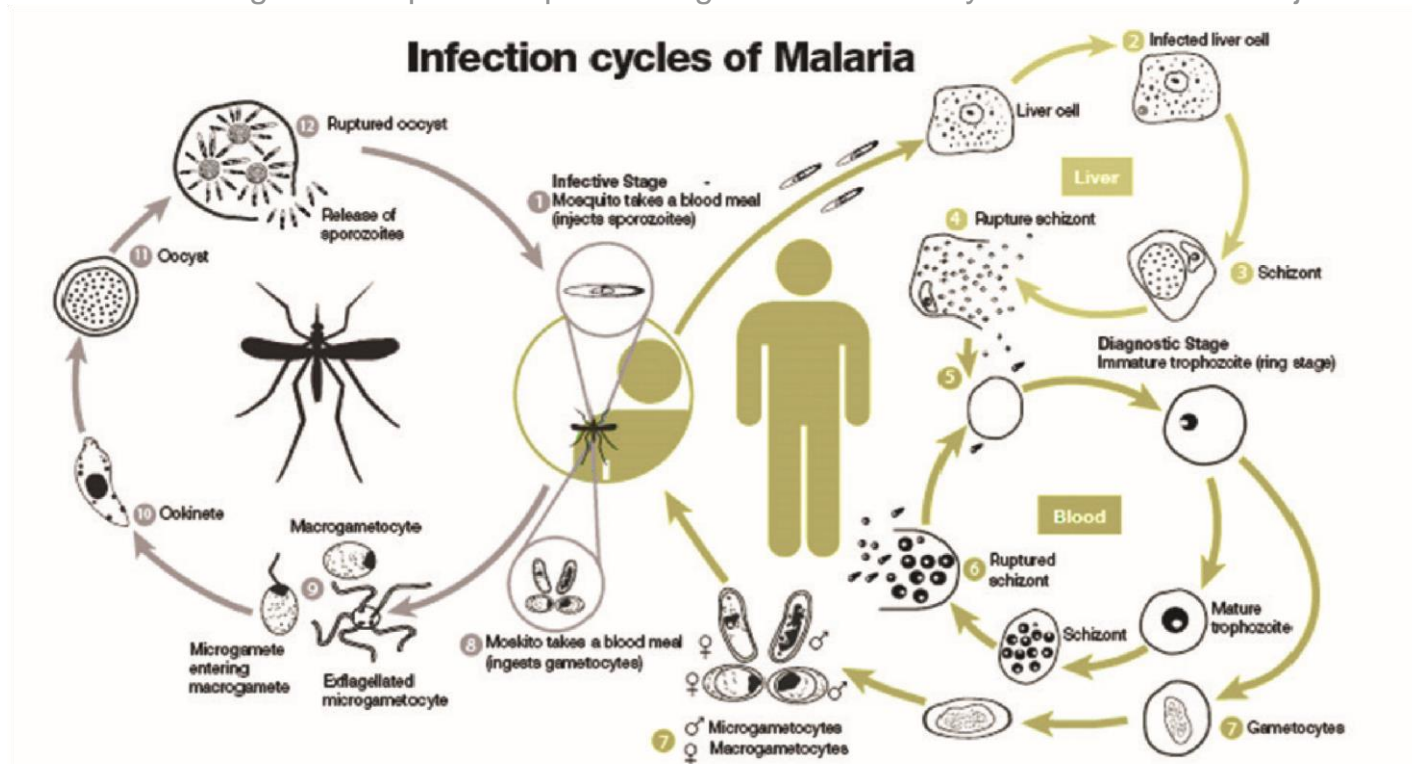
HOW DO WE RULE OUT MALARIA

Blood tests can be done two ways. Firstly a pin prick test can be done (on your fingertip) and a drop of blood put onto a rapid test which gives a read out in a couple of minutes. It is analogous to over the counter pregnancy tests - this sort of testing is quick, accessible and easy, but is not considered reliable enough to rule out malaria. If it is positive it is normally quite reliable, but if it says negative, that is not reliable.

The second and better way is to draw blood in a lab and get it inspected by a pathologist with a microscope looking for malaria parasites. This takes longer and is more expensive but is much more accurate. There is one important rule to know though:

You must have three (3) blood specimens taken ideally around 12-24 hours apart and ideally taken when you have a spike of fever before you can confidently rule out malaria.

Again, if any test is positive then you have malaria. The problem is that if one is negative you can't be sure. This is because the malaria parasites have to be seen in your red blood cells to diagnose malaria. Their normal life cycle involves multiplication within red cells then breaking out of them and circulating around your body and then entering other red cells and starting the multiplication process again. Therefore if you take the blood at just the



stage when parasites are not in your cells, it's tough to pick it up. Hence the rule of three tests before you can be positive you do not have malaria. Actually even then it is possible to miss it, if you still feel unwell and suspicious it could be malaria after three negative tests then talk to an infectious disease specialist about this).

If you are still in Africa when the symptoms appear, doctors are very used to seeing and treating malaria patients. However if you return home to Europe or America etc. Many doctors may palm off the uncomplicated symptoms as a bad bout of flu.

You need to be proactive and ensure that your doctor understands that you were in a malaria area and had not been taking prophylactic medication at that time and make sure that you have all three blood tests to exclude malaria.