



MALARIA Q&A (updated April 2008)

What is malaria?

Malaria is a mosquito-borne disease caused by any one of four parasites of the *Plasmodium* species. Malaria is transmitted to people by the bite of an infective female *Anopheles* mosquito. This disease is a leading cause of debilitating illness worldwide, with an estimated 300-500 million clinical cases each year and over 1 million deaths. If promptly diagnosed and adequately treated, malaria is a curable disease. Although malaria was a significant public health problem in Georgia before 1950, nearly all cases reported in Georgia in recent years have been acquired in foreign countries.

Who gets malaria?

Any person residing in or traveling to a country where malaria is endemic is at risk for acquiring the disease. More than 90% of malaria cases occur in sub-Saharan Africa. Susceptibility to malaria is universal, although immunity can result in milder symptoms of disease. Among residents of Georgia, travel to Nigeria, Cameroon, or India to visit friends and relatives is a commonly cited risk factor.

How is malaria spread?

Malaria is spread by the bite of an infective female *Anopheles* mosquito. Transfusion of blood from infected persons and use of contaminated needles and syringes are other modes of transmission.

What are the symptoms of malaria?

Malaria causes a flu-like illness with symptoms that include fever, shaking chills, headache, muscle aches, and tiredness. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may also occur.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Depending on the infecting species, there are usually 7-30 days between the infective mosquito bite and the appearance of clinical symptoms. One species, called *Plasmodium vivax*, may have a prolonged incubation period of 8 to 10 months. When infection occurs by blood transfusion, the incubation period depends on the number of parasites transferred but is usually less than two months.

When and for how long is a person able to spread malaria?

Direct person-to-person transmission does not occur. Untreated or insufficiently treated individuals may be a source of mosquito infection for up to three years, depending on the species.

What is the treatment for malaria?

Due to changing patterns of drug-resistance, current recommendations can be obtained from your doctor or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention malaria website at <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria>.

How can a person find out if they have malaria?

Consult a doctor, who may look for malaria parasites in a blood specimen.

How can malaria be prevented?

American citizens are exposed most frequently during foreign travel to malarious areas. Travelers should take proper preventive drug therapy (i.e. malaria prophylaxis) before visiting an area where



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malaria is endemic. Additionally, prevent mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and by applying insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin. Mosquitoes that transmit malaria bite between dusk and dawn, so sleeping under a mosquito net can also help prevent malaria.

Where can I get additional information on malaria?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention malaria website is <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/index.htm>. For specific information about malaria recommendations for your country of travel, see the CDC Traveler's Health website at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>.