

Malaria and Tropical Travel

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC - safer, healthier people.

[Ms. Divine] Hi, I'm Beatrice Divine from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Malaria is a serious disease caused by a parasite that can infect a certain type of mosquito. People who are traveling in tropical areas where malaria is present can get malaria if they're bitten by an infected mosquito. Today, I'm here with Dr. Meredith McMorrow from CDC's Malaria Branch, Domestic Response Unit. She's going to tell us about preventing malaria during travel. Welcome, Dr. McMorrow.

[Dr. McMorrow] Thank you; it's my pleasure.

[Ms. Divine] Dr. McMorrow, we know with summer approaching, many people are making plans to travel abroad, for a variety of reasons. Some may be returning home to their country of origin to visit friends and relatives. They may be taking the kids to meet grandma and grandpa for the first time. Some may just be planning a relaxing vacation. In which areas of the world should travelers be concerned about malaria?

[Dr. McMorrow] Malaria occurs primarily in parts of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Central and South America, and in limited parts of the Caribbean, such as the island of Hispaniola, where Haiti and the Dominican Republic are located, and in some countries in the South Pacific.

[Ms. Divine] How would a person know if they are traveling to an area of malaria risk?

[Dr. McMorrow] That's a very good question. As part of planning for overseas travel during the summer, or any time of year, CDC recommends a visit to a healthcare provider before you travel because they can tell you if malaria is a problem in the areas you'll be visiting. It's also a good idea to see a healthcare provider before travel for any other vaccines, medications, or additional information that might be helpful in preventing sickness or injury during your trip.

[Ms. Divine] Where else can a traveler get more information about malaria-risk areas?

[Dr. McMorrow] In addition to visiting your healthcare provider, this information is also available on CDC's malaria website at www.cdc.gov/malaria. The malaria website has two important resources. One is the CDC Travel Medicine textbook, Health Information for International Travel, which is also known as the Yellow Book. Chapter five of the Yellow Book has a table of malaria and yellow fever risk by country. Another newer resource on the website is the interactive malaria map. And on the map, a person can select the country they're traveling to and then search by city, place, or county to find out if the area they'll be visiting has malaria there.

[Ms. Divine] So what can a person do to protect themselves from malaria?

[Dr. McMorrow] Once it's determined that a person will be at risk for malaria infection, a healthcare provider can prescribe an antimalarial drug to prevent malaria. Because there are several kinds of antimalarial drugs, the healthcare provider, along with the patient, will decide which will be the best drug for that person, based upon where they're traveling, their medical history, age, any drug allergies, pregnancy status, and other factors.

Antimalarial drugs are not 100 percent protective; therefore, it's important that other measures be taken to prevent mosquito bites, such as using an insect repellent with 30 to 50 percent DEET, and if the person isn't staying in screened-in or air-conditioned housing, sleeping under an insecticide-treated bed net. More details about this can also be found on CDC's malaria website.

[Ms. Divine] Some international travelers may be taking children with them. Should infants and children also take an antimalarial drug?

[Dr. McMorrow] Yes. Because children of any age can get malaria when they travel to a risk area, they should be on an antimalarial drug for protection. However, not all types of malaria drugs can be given to children. A healthcare provider will be able to discuss with parents the best antimalarial drug for their children. Doses are based on the child's weight.

[Ms. Divine] What is CDC's advice for pregnant women who plan to travel to a country where malaria is present?

[Dr. McMorrow] CDC recommends that pregnant women NOT travel to malaria-risk areas. If a woman gets malaria during her pregnancy, her illness can be more severe than in women who aren't pregnant. Babies born to women with malaria can be premature or stillborn, or the mother can miscarry the pregnancy. If the pregnant woman can't avoid travel to a malaria-risk area, it's extremely important that she use an effective antimalarial drug. However, there are only a few antimalarial drugs that can be given to pregnant women, and no preventive drugs are completely effective. Pregnant women should discuss all of their travel health risks with their healthcare provider.

[Ms. Divine] Does a person who's born in a country where malaria is present, but who's now living in the U.S. and has been for some time, need to worry about getting malaria when they return home to visit friends and relatives?

[Dr. McMorrow] Yes. Anyone who goes to a malaria-risk country should take precautions against malaria, even if they used to live there. They are at as much risk of contracting malaria as someone who was born in the United States.

[Ms. Divine] Dr McMorrow, there seems to be a lot of concern about people buying antimalarial drugs overseas. Should there be concern?

[Dr. McMorrow] Yes, there is reason to be concerned because buying medications abroad has its risks. For one thing, the drugs could be of poor quality because of the way that they are produced. They could have contaminants in them or they could be counterfeit medicines and may not provide the malaria protection needed. In addition, some medications that are sold

overseas aren't used in the United States or were never sold here. That means that some of these drugs have not been tested for safety or effectiveness, according to U.S. standards. CDC recommends that travelers purchase all the medications they need before leaving the United States.

[Ms. Divine] I've noticed that there are also some herbal or alternative products that are being marketed these days for preventing malaria. Do you have any advice for travelers about these products?

[Dr. McMorrow] Many of these herbal products haven't been researched and tested to prove their safety and effectiveness against malaria, so a person using them could still get malaria. People who take them may also have a false sense of security, and if they become sick, they may not think that it's malaria. CDC's advice to travelers is to beware of all antimalarial drugs obtained without a physician's prescription, as these drugs may not protect against malaria. It's important to remember that, although malaria is a serious disease that can even lead to death in some cases, it's also a preventable disease with the right drugs and other precautions. If a person does get malaria, it can be cured, as long as it's diagnosed and treated promptly. Anyone traveling in, or who has returned from, a malaria-risk area should monitor their health for up to one year after returning. If they develop fever or flu-like symptoms, they should see a healthcare provider right away, and tell him or her about where they've traveled.

[Ms. Divine] Dr McMorrow, please remind our listeners about where they can get more information on malaria.

[Dr. McMorrow] They can go to CDC's malaria website at www.cdc.gov/malaria.

[Ms. Divine] Thank you, Dr McMorrow, for sharing this important travel information with our listeners.

[Dr. McMorrow] Thank you.

[Announcer] The CDC Travelers' Health and Animal Importation Branch is pleased to present this travel tip, and wishes all travelers a safer, healthier trip.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.