

Malaria

Malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease, transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito occurring in many tropical regions of the world

Malaria is a potentially serious parasitic infection transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. In humans the disease is caused by five different species of the *Plasmodium* parasite. Malaria is widely distributed throughout tropical regions of the world including in parts of Africa, Asia, Central and South America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Oceania. Malaria is preventable and curable if diagnosed and treated promptly.

Around 1,500 cases of malaria are reported annually in travellers returning to or arriving in the UK, with an average of six deaths from malaria reported in travellers from the UK between 2014 and 2023. The risk of malaria varies according to season, geographic location, activities, type of accommodation, and the use of malaria prevention tablets and bite avoidance measures. UK Health Security Agency [Guidelines for malaria prevention in travellers from the UK](#) are updated annually and provide country-specific malaria risk information. This information is also available in our [Country Information pages](#). Climate change may have an impact on regions where mosquitoes and malaria parasites are found. As this could alter risk areas, malaria advice in our Country Information pages is regularly reviewed.

All travellers visiting areas where malaria occurs are at risk of acquiring the disease, particularly migrants to the UK who were born in malaria risk areas and return to visit friends and relatives in their country of birth. Any immunity travellers may have acquired in their country of origin wanes rapidly on migration to a country with no risk of malaria; their UK-born children will have no protection from the disease. Certain travellers are at increased risk of severe disease such as: pregnant women, those with an absent or poorly functioning spleen, children and older travellers.

Symptoms of malaria vary, but typically include fever, headache, tiredness, and muscle aches. Cough and diarrhoea may also occur. Malaria from all species can be disabling however malaria caused by the species *Plasmodium falciparum* can progress rapidly and cause life-threatening complications if prompt treatment is not given.

Prevention

Prevention of malaria involves several steps. These steps can be remembered as the 'ABCD' of malaria prevention:

- **A**wareness of the risk
- **B**ite prevention
- **C**hemoprophylaxis (use of appropriate malaria prevention tablets)
- **D**iagnosis (prompt diagnosis and treatment)

No regimen is 100% effective, but a combination of preventive measures will give significant protection against the potentially severe consequences of malaria.

Choice of malaria prevention tablets depends on the malaria species common in the area to be

visited and whether there is resistance to any of the available drugs. Certain drugs may not be suitable for certain individuals due to existing medical problems or interactions with their regular medication.

Our [Country Information pages](#) provide country-specific information on malaria prevention medication. There is no malaria vaccine available for travellers.

Travellers should follow [insect bite avoidance advice](#), including covering up with loosely fitting clothes, ideally long sleeves, long trousers and socks if out of doors. This helps to reduce biting mosquitoes' access to skin.

All travellers should be aware of the signs and symptoms of malaria and should be advised to seek immediate medical attention if these occur either whilst abroad or up to a year after their return. They should also let the health professional know they have visited a malaria risk area.

Choice of drugs to treat malaria will depend on the species of parasite causing the illness and the likelihood of resistance to recommended drug treatments.

Resources

- More detailed information can be found in our [malaria factsheet](#)
- [UKHSA: Malaria: guidance, data and analysis](#)
- [UKHSA: Malaria prevention guidelines for travellers from the UK](#)
- [World Health Organization: World malaria report 2024](#)