

## MALARIA

### THE DISEASE

With over 250 million new cases occurring each year, malaria remains a major health problem in most tropical regions. In Africa 2 million people die every year from malaria.



The malaria parasite is spread by the female anopheles mosquito. The parasite settles in the liver where it commences cycles of reproduction that can last six to twelve days depending on the species. During each cycle the malaria organism grows into a large cell containing thousands of new parasites. These eventually burst and when released they enter the blood cells. The infected blood cells burst and the parasites flood the circulation and invade new red blood cells. This cycle is repeated every two to three days.

### THE SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of malaria coincide with release of the parasites into the circulation. Symptoms can be variable and non-specific and can be difficult to distinguish from the flu or other tropical illnesses. The incubation period (the time between the mosquito bite and the symptoms appearing) can be 1 - 3 weeks, but may be up to a year. Symptoms include:

fever	sweats	headaches
chills	muscle pains	lethargy
coughing	diarrhoea	abdominal discomfort
confusion	jaundice	

Coma or death can possibly occur.

The four types of malaria parasite are falciparum, vivax, ovale and malariae. Of these falciparum is the most serious and causes 95% of malaria deaths.

It is essential to seek medical advice as soon as possible if any fever develops after travelling in an area where malaria occurs.

### WHERE IS MALARIA FOUND?

Malaria is found in large parts of Central and South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific Islands. Up to one in thirty long term travellers will catch malaria in high risk areas such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and one in fifty in Sub-Saharan Africa. The risk is lower in India, Southeast Asia and Central and South America.

A traveller's risk of malaria will vary greatly according to length of stay, accommodation, time of year and activities. Transmission is more common in rural areas and in the wet season. Malaria is not usually a risk at altitudes above 1800m.