

MALARIA

Malaria is a **disease that is very frequent in tropical and sub-tropical countries**. It is caused by a parasite, which is injected into humans through the bite of an infected *anopheles* mosquito.

The parasites responsible for transmitting malaria are 4: the most diffuse in equatorial Africa, the Amazon forest, and South-East Asia is the *Plasmodium falciparum*, responsible for the most dangerous form of malaria (malignant tertian malaria). Instead, in Central America, the Middle East, and in the Indian sub continent, the most common is the *Plasmodium vivax*, responsible for benign tertian malaria.

The risk of contracting malaria is greater in sub-urban areas, during the evening hours or at night and during rainy seasons.

Every year, throughout the world, at least 300 million acute cases of malaria are verified, with more than 1 million resulting in death. Approximately 90% of these deaths occur in Africa, and the most affected are children.

HOW DOES MALARIA MANIFEST ITSELF?

After 7-20 days (yet, several weeks may pass) from the mosquito bite, the following symptoms appear: high fever, chills, headache, diarrhea, abdominal pain, vomit, cough, muscular pain and, at times, anemia or jaundice.

Therapy must begin as soon as possible. In the absence of rapid and efficient treatment, malignant tertian malaria can result in serious consequences, or death.

Pregnant women and young children develop serious, complicated clinical forms of tertian malaria more frequently.

HOW TO PREVENT CONTRACTING MALARIA

The risk of contracting malaria during a trip in a tropical or sub-tropical region can be reduced by using personal protection against mosquito bites and taking medication:

a) The first includes a series of useful precautions to follow, in order to reduce the number of

mosquito bites, a risk that occurs most between sunset and sunrise.

In particular, if going out after sunset, wear clothing that covers the body as much as possible, avoiding dark colors or bright colors and perfume that can attract mosquitoes. The skin surface, which has remained uncovered (face, hands) should be protected by chemical substances (mosquito repellents) to keep away the mosquitoes.

Instead, inside the home, mosquito screens can be used, and doors and windows should be kept closed during the night. An insecticide should be sprayed in the areas of greater use.

b) the use of medication (anti-malaria pharmacological prevention) is very useful when staying in a

high-risk region for a limited time.

The medication must be taken several weeks (at least one week) before departing and must continue for 4 weeks after returning to Italy.

Notwithstanding the precautions taken, one may still become infected. Therefore, it is very important to observe for the onset of a temperature that might occur from a week after arriving in the region being visited, to several months after returning home. If this occurs, contact the nearest medical center as soon as possible for tests.

If you are planning a trip to your native country, particularly, if you are pregnant or if there are children traveling with you, contact the nearest Public Health Service at least one month before departing.

Further information will be given, including personal instructions on the best method to use to defend yourself from malaria, along with the medication to take during your trip.

Updated: June 2003/Aggiornato a giugno 2003

Translated by Cooperativa INTEGRA/Tradotto dalla Cooperativa INTEGRA

With the contribution of the Province of Modena/Con il contributo della Provincia di Modena

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