



Malaria – Frequently Asked Questions

What is malaria?

Malaria is a potentially life-threatening disease caused by the *Plasmodium* parasite. It is primarily transmitted to humans through the bite of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes. When an infected mosquito bites a person, the parasites pass into the bloodstream. The parasites then multiply and attack red blood cells, causing symptoms like fever, chills, headache, and fatigue. If not treated, malaria can become very dangerous and even deadly.

Although malaria was a significant public health problem in Georgia before 1950¹, there has been no documentation of a locally transmitted case in over 20 years².

Who gets malaria?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were an estimated 247 million malaria cases worldwide in 2021³. The CDC estimates about 2,000 cases of malaria are diagnosed in the United States each year, with most cases being from travelers and immigrants returning from countries where malaria is present.

While not all travelers get malaria, it's most often diagnosed in individuals who have recently traveled to tropical and subtropical regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and parts of Central and South America. If you plan on traveling to one of these areas, talk to your doctor about medicine you can take to help prevent malaria infection (prophylaxis).

Although malaria can be transmitted congenitally (mother to baby during pregnancy) and through blood donations, these cases are exceedingly rare, and these scenarios have not been documented in Georgia.

How is malaria spread?

Malaria is primarily spread through the bites of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes. These mosquitoes carry the malaria parasites in their salivary glands. When they bite a person, they inject the parasites into their bloodstream.

It's important to note that malaria **cannot** be directly transmitted from person to person (e.g., by coughing or sneezing). The only way to contract malaria is through the bite of an infected mosquito. However, in rare cases, malaria can be transmitted through blood transfusions, organ transplants, or from a mother to her unborn child during pregnancy or childbirth. These modes of transmission are less common compared to mosquito bites.

What are the symptoms of malaria?

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/malaria/about/history/history_cdc.html

² <https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/32/8/e124/480563>

³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malaria>

The symptoms of malaria typically include fever, chills, sweats, headache, body aches, fatigue, nausea, and vomiting. If left untreated, malaria can progress to severe illness and cause complications such as organ failure, anemia, and cerebral malaria, which affects the brain. In some cases, malaria can be fatal.

If you suspect you have malaria, it's important to seek medical attention immediately.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Incubation periods (the time between the mosquito bite and symptoms starting) vary based on the type of malaria. However, most cases will show symptoms from 7 to 30 days. Some people experience cycles of malaria, where they may feel better for a few days and then get another "attack" of symptoms.

Does past infection with malaria make a person immune?

Evidence shows that people routinely exposed to malaria may have some immunity to the disease⁴.

What is the treatment for malaria?

If you suspect you have malaria, your doctor may order tests to determine which type of malaria you have. If your symptoms are severe enough, you may start receiving treatment before the results of those tests return. Specific treatment depends on many factors, including the type of malaria, resistance to medicine, the patient's weight and age, and pregnancy status. However, treatment is an anti-malarial drug (or combination of drugs) in a pill (most common) or injectable form.

What can be done to prevent the spread of malaria?

The most effective way to prevent malaria is to prevent mosquito bites, especially in areas where malaria is found. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants and apply insect repellent containing DEET to the exposed skin. Mosquitoes that transmit malaria bite between dusk and dawn, so sleeping under a mosquito net or avoiding outdoor activities at those times can also help prevent malaria. Travelers should take proper preventive drug therapy (i.e., malaria prophylaxis) before visiting an area where malaria is endemic.

Where can I get additional information about malaria?

For general information about malaria and surveillance for mosquito-borne diseases in Georgia, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/malaria> or call your local health department or the Georgia Department of Public Health at 404-657-2588.

For national malaria data, visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/malaria/index.html>.

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⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2620631/>