

# Malaria Prophylaxis and Compliance

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Those of us in the business of counseling patients for international travel are well aware of the issues and importance of malaria prophylaxis before entering a malaria endemic area. It is apparently less clear, and less of an issue to many people who are doing the actual traveling.

There are between 300,000,000-500,000,000 cases of malaria any given year in tropical and sub-tropical countries. Out of this number, 1,000,000 cases will be fatal. One would think that with these kinds of numbers, anyone traveling into an area where malaria is endemic, would be more than willing to take medication that can help prevent an infection with the malaria parasite.

The culprit is usually advice given by a friend “who has been there, done that” and advises against it, or someone who has had adverse effects from taking malaria prevention in the past. I have had many people ask me if it wouldn't just be better to risk it and then get treated if you get malaria. My answer is always a resounding, “No!” Severe cases of malaria can result in cerebral malaria, and multiple organ failure resulting in death. That is hardly worth the risk.

Good education and counseling on what malaria is, how to prevent it via the use of medication, DEET/Permethrin products, and the use of permethrin treated mosquito netting can help convince the patient of the importance of preventing malaria. Stressing the need to take all the medication, and the fact that the pills you take after leaving the endemic area are just as important as the ones you take while there, can go a long way towards preventing an outbreak of the illness post-trip.

Recently brought to our attention was the case of a mission group participant in The Woodlands area who assumed that she had not picked up an infection when she left Africa. She stopped taking her pills post trip, and subsequently died from an outbreak that occurred later. Because malaria can occur up to a year after your return, the entire course of malaria medication is very important in order to take care of any infection that might have occurred.

Making sure that you visit a travel health professional who is up on the latest information to receive your malaria prescription is also very important so that you are sure of getting the malaria prophylaxis that is indicated for your area of travel. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.