

# All About Malaria



A community question and answer book for a better understanding of malaria



Ministry of Health



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Communications Support for Health

# All About Malaria

## Foreword

Studies in Zambia and elsewhere show that health workers are the main and most trusted source of information on health for mothers. Therefore the role of health workers' as communicators is important for protecting people's health. Health workers should look for opportunities to share information and should encourage questions from mothers and other family members.

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## Introduction

This booklet is designed to aid health workers and community health volunteers to provide accurate and clear responses to people's questions about malaria. The booklet can be used either in one-to-one conversations or in group discussions in a health facility or in a community. The health worker or volunteer can ask the group members to answer questions and then compare the book's answers to the responses offered. The facilitator can then lead a discussion based on these answers.

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## Details About Malaria

### 1. What causes malaria?

Malaria is a disease caused by a tiny organism (called a parasite) that some female mosquitoes carry. When these mosquitoes bite people, the malaria parasites enter the person's blood. Most people will fall sick 7 to 14 days later.

### 2. How do these parasites get into the mosquitoes?

A mosquito acquires the malaria parasites when it bites a person with malaria. The parasites enter the mosquito through the blood that the mosquito takes in. That mosquito can then pass on the parasites to other people that it bites.

### 3. Do the malaria parasites make the mosquitoes sick?

No, they don't affect the mosquitoes, just people.

### 4. Are there any other ways that a person can become sick with malaria?

Almost all cases of malaria are spread through mosquito bites. It is possible to get malaria if you receive blood from an infected person, but this is very rare. There are many traditional beliefs about other things that cause malaria, such as a lot of rain or bad spirits, but the real cause in almost every case is a mosquito bite.



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### 5. What does malaria do to someone who is bitten by a mosquito?

A person with malaria usually shows these signs:

- High body temperature, following by chills
- Muscle ache (pain)
- Diarrhea and vomiting

If malaria is untreated and becomes severe, the following may happen:

- Vomiting everything
- Feeling very weak and tired
- Convulsions or fits
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of consciousness
- (for babies) inability to breastfeed
- Serious cases can lead to death.

### 6. Who does malaria affect the most?

Malaria is particularly serious for young children and pregnant women, because they are less able to defend themselves against the disease. Malaria in pregnant women can also cause her to become anemic (have weak blood), lose her baby (have a miscarriage), give birth too soon before the baby is ready for delivery, and even kill the mother. Malaria is one of the most common and dangerous illnesses suffered by Zambians.

### 7. Is malaria a danger in rainy season only, when there are lots of mosquitoes?

It is true that there is more malaria when there are more mosquitoes, but there are mosquitoes with malaria all year round, so there is always some danger of being bitten and infected.

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## Prevention

### 8. Can malaria be prevented?

Yes, malaria can be prevented by doing a number of things to avoid mosquito bites. The best way is by always sleeping under an insecticide-treated mosquito net, which is called an ITN for short. These nets are common and easily available in Zambia (see #10 below). Since malaria mosquitoes bite mostly late at night, you are safe from mosquito bites if you always sleep under an ITN. Because pregnant women and young children are not able to defend themselves well against malaria, it is most important for them to sleep under an ITN, but it is recommended for everyone.

### 9. Does sleeping under an ITN have any other benefits?

Yes, the ITN is made specifically to kill mosquitoes, but it can also kill or keep away other insects such as bedbugs and cockroaches.

### 10. Where can a person get an ITN?

ITNs are given free to pregnant women during antenatal visits, and there are also occasional campaigns when nets are distributed. If you cannot obtain a free ITN, you can purchase one from a market, store, or trader. The cost of the net is definitely worth paying because an ITN prevents the suffering, inability to work, and possibility of dying from malaria.

### 11. How should an ITN be hanged?

It is not difficult to hang an ITN correctly if you follow the instructions and drawings on the package.



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You can attach a piece of rope to the ceiling to hang the net in the middle of the sleeping area. If you have a conical (round) net, you can use just one rope tied to the center of the top of the net. If you have a rectangular net, you may need to tie the ropes in each corner. If you sleep on a mat on the floor, then the rope will need to be longer. The bottom of the hanging net should go over the edges of a raised bed and should touch the floor if you are sleeping on a mat. Tuck in the edge of the net under the mattress or mat to be sure no mosquitoes have a way in. In the morning twist the net and tie it high out of your way.

### 12. If families lack sufficient nets to cover every sleeping space, what should they do?

Pregnant women and children under 5 years of age should be given the first opportunity to sleep under an ITN, since they become more severely ill from malaria than other persons. It is recommended that you also obtain additional ITNs if your family does not have enough. The more ITNs in the house, the safer everyone who sleeps there will be. Free nets are sometimes available at antenatal visits and in health campaigns.

### 13. Is the insecticide in the net safe for babies, pregnant women or other people?

The insecticide in the net does not harm people. However, it is very dangerous to mosquitoes and some other insects -- it kills them.

### 14. Doesn't sleeping under an ITN make people itchy?

Normally, the ITNs do not make people itchy. However, if someone washes the net and then people sleep under it before it has dried completely, they can feel itchy. The net does not cause itchiness if it is completely dry.

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## 15. Can people sleep comfortably under an ITN?

The holes in the net allow air to pass through and make it comfortable for most people to sleep. If it is hot in the house, people can open two windows or a window and a door, so that the air flows better through the house.

## 16. How should people care for their ITNs?

The following actions are recommended for good care of ITNs:

- Tie it up out of the way in the morning
- Pull it down and tuck it in in the evening
- Keep it away from sharp edges to avoid tears
- Mend any holes
- Wash the ITN every three months

## 17. Are there any other ways to prevent mosquito bites?

Yes, if the Government provides insecticide spraying where you live, you should welcome the spraymen and women to spray your home. The insecticide kills many mosquitoes and prevents their bites for six months.

## 18. Does any medicine keep pregnant women protected from malaria?

Yes, there is medicine that the Ministry of Health recommends for pregnant women. Pregnant women should receive three doses of malaria prevention medicine when they go for antenatal care visits. This medicine doesn't prevent mosquito bites, but it does prevent the serious effects of malaria. Pregnant women are therefore encouraged to begin attending antenatal care early to obtain this medicine a few times.



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## 19. Is this malaria prevention medicine safe for pregnant women and their unborn babies?

Yes, the malaria prevention medicine is safe for the mothers and babies, so there is no need to worry.

## 20. Does the malaria prevention medicine have any side effects?

Sleepiness, nausea and weakness can occur after taking the medicine, but these side effects are easy to prevent if the woman eats just before taking the medicine. If you have a full stomach, the medicine should not cause any big problems afterwards.

## 21. How can women ensure they have a full stomach after a long walk and then waiting in line for their check-up?

They need to either bring some food from home or buy some food when they are near the health center. Eating will also give them energy for your walk home.

## 22. Why do nurses advise early antenatal care booking?

The Ministry of Health recommends that women come for antenatal care as soon as they suspect they are pregnant. This allows the health worker to examine and test them to be sure that their pregnancy is going well, as well as a chance to give them the malaria prevention medicine and iron folate tablets, which will strengthen their blood. They can also check that the baby is lying in a way that usually means an easy delivery. Finally, they can give good advice on how to feed and care for the baby.



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## Malaria Testing

### 23. Why do health workers & volunteers want to test a person's blood for malaria before they give any treatment?

Several other diseases have the same signs and symptoms as malaria. This is why the Ministry of Health recommends the malaria test for all persons who have some of the malaria symptoms. The test requires only a quick pin prick, and the results are ready in 15 minutes. If the results are positive, the person can begin the free treatment right away. If the results are negative, the person can be quite certain that they don't have malaria, and the health worker will try to learn what else might be causing the symptoms, and so he or she is sure to give the right medicine.

### 24. When should a person go for this test?

The things to look for are: high body temperature, feeling cold or shivering, sweating, headache, and body ache. A person with one or more of these symptoms should go right away for a malaria test.

### 25. Where can people get the test done?

All government health facilities can do the malaria test for free. Some community health workers can also do the test. Malaria tests are also available in private clinics and some private pharmacies.

### 26. Is the test only for malaria?

Yes, it is a test designed to show whether or not someone has malaria. It is very reliable. It does not identify any other diseases.



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## Malaria Treatment

### 27. What is the treatment for malaria like?

The amount of medicine a person should take daily will depend on their weight and test results. The doctor or nurse will give instructions for taking the pills. The person will have to take these pills for several days, and it is very important to take all of the pills, even though you may feel better after just a couple of them. This is because even though you might feel better, the medicine has not yet killed all of the parasites. Besides taking the medicine, the sick person needs to eat and drink to get better faster. This is not always easy because the disease causes loss of appetite. The best advice is to give small amounts of healthy food and drink many times a day. For a person with malaria, small amounts are easier to digest than larger meals. Breast milk or other liquids is also important because the malaria fever burns up some water in a person's body, and this water needs to be replaced to keep the person healthy.

### 28. Can the treatment make you feel bad?

There may possibly be some discomfort, but this can be greatly reduced if the person follows the health workers' instructions, including suggestions on eating and drinking. If discomfort continues, the person should discuss it with the health worker.

### 29. Will the treatment prevent future attacks of malaria?

No, to prevent mosquito bites, the person still needs to sleep under an ITN and take other preventive measures or they can get sick with malaria again.



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## Here are some Key Malaria Messages YOU need to know!!!

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**1** Malaria is transmitted through mosquito bites. Pregnant women and children under five years of age should sleep under an Insecticide treated net every night throughout the year.

**2** Pregnant women should attend antenatal clinic as soon as they know they are pregnant and take malaria prevention medicine throughout pregnancy as advised by their health care worker.

**3** Malaria can be a very serious illness. If you or your family member have any of the common signs and symptoms ( high body temperature, feeling cold or shivering, sweating, headache, joint body pains), you should immediately go for malaria testing and treatment at the nearest health facility near you.

**4** A child suffering or recovering from malaria needs plenty of liquids and food. Give small amounts of food throughout the day.

