Malaria

What is malaria?
Malaria is an illness that causes fever, shaking chills and flu-like symptoms such as headaches, muscle aches and extreme tiredness. Malaria can cause very severe illness, and can be fatal if not treated. Some types of malaria cause symptoms to repeat after months or years. Most people in the U. S. who have malaria have traveled to a foreign country in the last three months. If you have a fever and have recently traveled out of the country, tell your health care provider.

What causes malaria?
Malaria is caused by a parasite that is spread by mosquitoes. The parasite is called Plasmodia. There are four main types of malaria, which are Plasmodium (P). falciparum, P. vivax, P. malariae, and P. ovale. P. falciparum is found more often in areas close to the equator, and tends to cause the most serious illness. The other three types of malaria do not usually cause serious illness.

How is malaria spread?
Mosquitoes spread malaria. It may also be spread by a blood transfusion from an infected person, which is very rare. Malaria can be spread through used needles or syringes. Malaria can be spread from a mother to a baby during pregnancy, or by mosquitoes that were infected by someone who traveled where malaria is found.

How soon do symptoms of malaria appear?
The time between the bite of an infected mosquito and when illness starts depends on the type of malaria. With P. falciparum, it usually takes between nine to 14 days. The time from exposure to illness is 12 to 18 days for P. vivax and P. ovale, and is 18 to 40 days for P. malariae. With one type of P. vivax, it may be eight to ten months between exposure and when symptoms develop.

Who is most likely to get malaria?
Anyone who travels to or lives in a country where malaria is common is at risk of getting malaria. At this time, malaria occurs in Asia, Africa and Central and South America.

How can I prevent getting malaria?
If you travel to an area where malaria occurs, you can take steps to prevent getting it. Use mosquito repellent especially around the times of dawn and dusk. Use a mosquito net while sleeping. When outdoors, use mosquito repellent with DEET or picaridin (KBR 3023). Follow package directions for how to apply and how often.

Do I need to take any medicines to prevent malaria?
Before you travel to an area where malaria is common, see your health care provider. You will need a prescription for antimalarial medicine. Follow the instructions because you may need to start as early as two weeks before your trip. It is very important to take the medicine as prescribed. Homeopathic or natural medicines have not been effective. See the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website to find out the types of medicine you should take to prevent malaria at www.cdc.gov/travel.