

Medicines for the Prevention of Malaria While Traveling

Mefloquine

What is mefloquine?

Mefloquine (also known as mefloquine hydrochloride) is an antimalarial medicine. It is available in the United States by prescription only. It is available as a generic medicine and used to be sold under the brand name Lariam. It is available in tablets of 228mg base (250mg salt).

The 228mg base tablet is the same as the 250mg salt tablet. It is just two different ways of describing the same thing.

Mefloquine can be prescribed for either treatment or prevention of malaria.

This fact sheet provides information about its use for the prevention of malaria infection associated with travel.



Who can take mefloquine?

Mefloquine can be prescribed to adults and children of all ages. It can also be safely taken by pregnant women during all trimesters of pregnancy and nursing mothers.

Who should not take mefloquine?

People with psychiatric conditions including active depression, a recent history of depression, generalized anxiety disorder, psychosis, schizophrenia, and other major psychiatric disorders should not take mefloquine.

In addition, people with seizure disorders (epilepsy) and certain heart conditions (irregular heartbeat and conduction problems) should not take mefloquine.

How should I take mefloquine?

Both adults and children should take one dose of mefloquine per week starting at least 2 weeks before traveling to the area where malaria transmission occurs. They should take one dose per week while there, and for 4 consecutive weeks after leaving.

The weekly dosage for adults is 228mg base (250mg salt).

Your doctor will have calculated the correct weekly dose for your child based on the child's weight. The child's dose should not exceed the adult dose of 228mg base (250mg salt) per week. Mefloquine has a bitter taste. Children's doses may be added to something sweet such as a spoonful of honey or chocolate syrup to mask the flavor.

Where can I buy mefloquine?

Antimalarial drugs are available in the United States by prescription only. Medicines should be obtained at a pharmacy before travel rather than in the destination country. Buying medications abroad has its risks: the drugs could be of poor quality, contaminated, or counterfeit and not protect you against malaria.

Will mefloquine interact with my other medications?

Some other drugs can interact with mefloquine and cause you problems. Your doctor is responsible for evaluating the other medicines you are taking to ensure that there are no interactions between them and mefloquine. In some instances, medicines can be adjusted to minimize the interaction. You can also ask your pharmacist to check for drug interactions.

Malaria is a serious disease that can cause death if not treated right away. It is caused by a parasite that can infect a certain type of mosquito which feeds on humans.

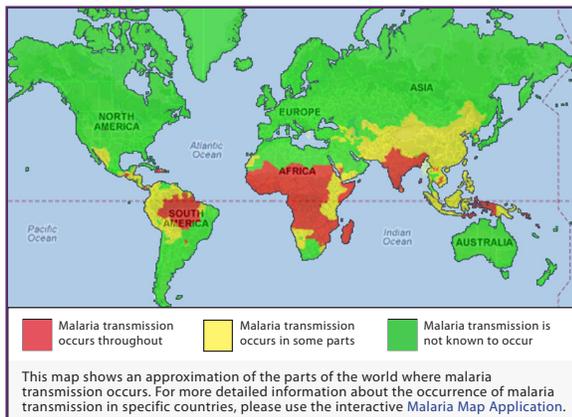
About 1,500 cases of malaria are diagnosed in the United States each year almost all in travelers to parts of the world where malaria occurs.

Mefloquine

In what parts of the world can mefloquine be used for prevention of malaria in travelers?

Mefloquine can be used in most parts of the world where malaria occurs. It is no longer effective for prevention in Southeast Asia and so should not be taken by travelers going to that part of the world. You should talk with your health care provider about your travel itinerary so he or she can identify if anti-malaria drugs are recommended where you are traveling and what kind.

CDC keeps track of all the places in the world where malaria transmission occurs and the malaria drugs that are recommended for use in each place. This information can be found using the malaria map on the CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/map/index.html>.



What are the potential side effects of mefloquine?

Most people do not experience significant side effects when taking mefloquine. However, for those persons that do experience the side effects, they can be unpleasant and unsettling.

Mefloquine can cause dizziness, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, vivid dreams, and visual disturbances. In rare instances mefloquine can cause seizures, depression, and psychosis. When they occur, these side effects start within the first few doses of the medicine. People who are concerned about the possibility of experiencing these side effects during their trip may choose to start the medicine three or more weeks before travelling. That way, if they do experience these side effects, they can stop the medicine and switch to a different option before leaving home.

Mefloquine may also cause stomach pain, nausea, and vomiting. These side effects can often be lessened by taking mefloquine with food.

Mefloquine is eliminated slowly from the body and so the side effects may continue for weeks after you have stopped taking the drug.

All medicines may have some side effects. Minor side effects such as nausea, occasional vomiting, or diarrhea usually do not require stopping the antimalarial drug. If you cannot tolerate your antimalarial drug, see your health care provider; other antimalarial drugs are available.

Other considerations

- Good choice for longer trips because you only have to take the medicine once per week.
- Usually, people who have not experienced side effects from mefloquine previously, do not experience side effects when they use it again.

How long is it safe to use mefloquine?

CDC has no recommended time limits on the duration of use of mefloquine for the prevention of malaria.

For more information:

Check out the CDC malaria website at <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria>

Health-care providers needing assistance with diagnosis or management of suspected cases of malaria should call the CDC Malaria Hotline: 770-488-7788 or 855-856-4713 toll-free (M-F, 9am-5pm, eastern time).

Emergency consultation after hours, call: 770-488-7100 and request to speak with a CDC Malaria Branch clinician.

Prevent Malaria

- Take an antimalarial drug.
- Prevent mosquito bites.
- If you get sick, immediately seek professional medical care.