

Protect Yourself from Malaria

Five cases of malaria have been confirmed in Florida and Texas, the first time the potentially fatal mosquito-borne disease has been locally acquired in the United States in 20 years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports.

The four Florida cases, along with one in Texas, have been diagnosed over a period of two months, the agency said. The CDC states that malaria is considered a medical emergency, and that anyone with symptoms should be "urgently evaluated." Effective treatment is available through hospitals and healthcare providers.

However, the CDC said that risk of malaria remains low in the United States, and that most cases are acquired when people travel outside of the country. A full 95% of malaria infections are acquired in Africa, the health agency said. Malaria is caused by five species of a parasite carried by certain female mosquitoes. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, muscle pain and fatigue. Nausea, diarrhea and vomiting may also appear. Malaria can cause life-threatening damage, including kidney failure, seizures, and coma.

For most people, symptoms begin 10 days to four weeks after infection, although a person may feel ill as early as seven days or as late as one year later. Two kinds of malaria, *P. vivax* and *P. ovale*, can occur again, which is called relapsing malaria. In *P. vivax* and *P. ovale* infections, some parasites can remain dormant in the liver for several months up to about four years after a person is bitten by an infected mosquito.

When these parasites come out of hibernation and begin invading red blood cells, the person becomes sick. The surest way to know whether you have malaria is to have a diagnostic blood test. If you are sick and there is any suspicion of malaria, a test should be performed without delay, according to the CDC.

The state of Florida has issued a mosquito-borne illness alert and recommended that residents drain standing pools of water, make sure their window screens do not have holes in them and use insecticides that contain DEET to repel mosquitoes. Long sleeved shirts and pants are also recommended when mosquitoes are present, especially during sunrise and sunset when they are most active.

The state of Texas has also issued a health alert, advising clinicians to routinely obtain a travel history to determine if a patient with symptoms of malaria has spent time outdoors and been bitten by mosquitoes in an area with malaria activity.

Taken from usnews.com, cdc.gov