



# Clinical Presentation of Malaria

Prof. Lucille Blumberg  
Deputy-Director, Head of Division, and Head of Travel Health  
National Institute for Communicable Diseases



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES  
Division of the National Health Laboratory Service

## Challenges



**Non-specific signs & symptoms low  
index of suspicion for malaria rapidly  
progressive disease**

Misdiagnosis and treatment delays **are** common



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES  
Division of the National Health Laboratory Service

## Symptoms



- Symptoms and signs of malaria may present as early as 7 days after exposure, with a usual range of 10 – 21 days elapsing after being bitten by an infected mosquito.
- The onset of symptoms is usually sudden



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES  
Division of the National Health Laboratory Service



## Malaria symptoms in Adults

- **“Influenza-like” illness**

- Fever
- Headache
- Rigors (cold and shiver / hot sweats)
- Myalgia
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhea, nausea and vomiting



## Malaria symptoms in Children

- Fever
- Lethargy
- Poor feeding
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Rapid breathing



## Symptoms of Severe Malaria

- Unable to drink
- Unable to breastfeed
- Repeated vomiting
- Unable to sit or stand
- Prostration
- Shortness of breath
- Impaired consciousness
- Convulsions
- Yellow eyes

## High Risk groups of Severe Malaria



- Pregnant (and postpartum) women
- Infants and young children
- Elderly patients (>65 years)
- Splenectomised patients
- Immunocompromised patients including patients with HIV/AIDS
- Non-immune patients

## Malaria symptoms mimic many other infections



**Fever, rigors**

**Influenza, dengue**, typhoid, urinary tract infection, African tick-bite fever, East African trypanosomiasis, Septicaemia, VHF

**Jaundice**

**Viral hepatitis**

**Mental state /  
Convulsions**

**Meningitis**

**Respiratory distress**

**Pneumonia**

## High Index of suspicion for Malaria



**Fever/ flu-like illness + travel to malaria area/  
residence in malaria area = MALARIA until  
disproved**

**Irrespective of time of year/low risk  
area or chemoprophylaxis.**



**WorldMEDSchool**  
GLOBAL EDUCATION

# Clinical Presentation of Malaria



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES**  
Division of the National Health Laboratory Service