Malarone to Prevent Malaria

What is Malarone?

Malarone is a combination of two drugs, atovaquone 250mg and proguanil 100mg. Proguanil is familiar to many as Paludrine, which has been widely used with chloroquine as a malaria prevention (prophylactic) drug.

Malarone is very effective, relatively free from side-effects but is expensive. It is used both as an effective treatment and also for prevention of malaria. Because Malarone only needs to be started 24 hours before going to a malarious area and continued for 7 days after returning it is especially useful for travellers making short or frequent trips.

Although the technical UK license for Malarone is for 28 days there is no evidence that long-term use is harmful and in the USA Malarone is licensed for unrestricted long-term use.

Current guidelines from the Advisory Committee on Malaria Prevention for UK Travellers (ACMP) concluded that there was no evidence of harm in the long-term use of Malarone, and that it could be taken confidently for periods of up to one year or longer. At InterHealth we will supply up to six months at a time.

How effective is Malarone?

Drug trials, which are still continuing, indicate that Malarone is very effective in preventing malaria, if taken correctly and regularly, in particular for preventing falciparum (malignant) malaria.

How safe is it and what are its side effects?

Malarone appears to be safe. Side effects are infrequent and mild, headache and abdominal pain being the most likely. Mouth ulcers and hair thinning occasionally occur in longer term use because of proguanil. Please read the Patient Information Leaflet which comes with the tablets.

Who should avoid it?

Malarone should not be used by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. The adult tablet should not be used as prevention for children or those under 40kg in weight but a paediatric formula for children is available (see separate information sheet). Malarone should not generally be used by anyone with impaired kidney function. As Malarone may occasionally interact with other medications, you should always discuss its use with your travel health advisor. Taking tetracyclines (including doxycycline) at the same time reduces its effectiveness.

How do you take it?

For preventing malaria the adult dose is one tablet daily starting 24 hours before entering a malarious area, taking it whilst there and continuing for 7 days after leaving. The tablets should be taken at the same time each day with food or a milky drink to aid absorption and achieve good protective levels.

Advice for travellers on warfarin
The risk of interaction between warfarin and malarone is low, however travelers taking both medications should take precautions. Malarone should be started at least one week prior to departure and a baseline INR should be checked prior to starting malarone. The INR should be rechecked again after 1 week of taking malarone. The dose of warfarin may need to be adjusted accordingly if there is an effect on the INR. For long trips overseas then the INR may need to be checked during travel. However the sensitivity of the testing agents for INR may vary between country. Once malarone is discontinued then the traveler can usually continue their usual dose of warfarin subject to rechecking the INR.

**InterHealth recommendations**

We recommend Malarone for preventing malaria for adults travelling to areas where there is chloroquine resistant malaria AND who are unable to tolerate other antimalarials such as mefloquine (Lariam) or doxycycline, or who have had attacks of malaria despite taking these drugs regularly. It is especially useful for short-term trips, when its expense is relatively less because it only needs to be taken for one week after return compared to 4 weeks with other forms of malaria prevention. If your sending organisation usually pays for the cost of antimalarials, we also need to know that they are happy to foot the bill.

Remember to take every precaution to avoid being bitten and to report any feverish illness without delay. No malaria prevention tablets are 100% effective.

**Further Guidance and Information**

There is a separate sheet on the use of Malarone Paediatric tablets.

More information can be found in: The Traveller’s Good Health Guide’, Ted Lankester; 3rd Edition 2006

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