



PIC QUESTION OF THE WEEK: 01/17/05

Q: I am planning to go to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic during spring break. Should I consider taking an antimalarial agent before traveling?

A: The risk of contracting malaria is dependent on the specific area of travel and preventive precautions, including appropriate drug therapy. Chloroquine was long considered the agent of choice for prophylaxis against the four common types of malaria (*Plasmodium falciparum*, *P. malariae*, *P. vivax*, and *P. ovale*). However, resistance to chloroquine has now been reported in most areas of Africa, South America, Asia and South Pacific, and the Indian Subcontinent. The current drugs of choice for travel to areas of chloroquine resistance are mefloquine (Lariam), atovaquone/proguanil (Malarone), and doxycycline (Vibramycin). Selection of the most appropriate product is sometimes based on their associated precautions and contraindications to use. Mefloquine should be avoided in patients with depression or other psychiatric illnesses, cardiac arrhythmias, or seizures. Atovaquone/proguanil should not be used in pregnant or lactating women or travelers with renal impairment. Doxycycline is not appropriate for pregnant women and persons prone to phototoxicity.

It has been previously recommended that travelers to the Dominican Republic, including the Punta Cana area, receive prophylaxis with chloroquine. This did not apply to the resort areas of Punta Cana. Beginning in November 2004, the CDC reported sixteen cases of malaria in tourists to the resort areas of Punta Cana and San Francisco de Macoris. The CDC now recommends chloroquine prophylaxis for all visitors to Punta Cana, including those traveling only to the resort areas. Adult dosage is 500mg (300mg base) once weekly, beginning one week before arrival and extending for four weeks after return. For more information on malaria prophylaxis dosage, use in pregnancy, etc., please consult the CDC website.

Reference:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Travelers' Health. www.cdc.gov/travel/ (accessed 2005 Jan 12).

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