Continued focus on malaria prevention can yield positive results

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Expats across the globe are often facing a high number of threats, especially those related to disease. Every country presents a unique scenario that has to be accounted for, and a lack of knowledge, preparation or international insurance could lead to dangerous, costly problems.

One of the most common diseases throughout the world is malaria, and a number of workers abroad are in countries that are currently coping with a rash of cases. While international health coverage is vital to cover any related expenses while outside of your home country, you should also take the proper steps to reduce the risk of exposure and stay safe at all times. Recently, the World Health Organization stressed a continued emphasis on prevention and education to further decrease the likelihood of a malaria outbreak.

Additional measures needed to eradicate malaria
April 25 marked World Malaria Day, and in honor of the event, WHO has released additional resources to help countries determine malaria risk and identify adequate steps to move forward with prevention.

The emphasis on malaria highlights the dangerousness of this disease, and expats who are living and working in affected countries may want to take note of recent trends and preventative measures. According to WHO, there has been a 42 percent reduction in malaria mortality rates worldwide since 2000, with a 49 percent drop noted in the organization’s African Region. Even some countries with especially high rates have the possibility of elimination in their future.

"Increased political commitment and the expansion of global malaria investments have saved some 3.3 million lives since 2000," said Dr. Margaret Chan, director-general at WHO. "Countries where malaria remains endemic now want to build on this success."

Recently, ground has been broken on the disease in several countries. WHO certified four nations as malaria-free since 2007: the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Turkmenistan and Armenia. In addition, 19 other countries have entered the pre-elimination or elimination phase, while seven more nations are not far behind that important stage.

Protective steps exist to prevent malaria
Given the prominence of malaria throughout the world, expats should take all available steps to reduce the likelihood of exposure. Thankfully, there are many ways you can go about that, in conjunction with international health insurance.
The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that malaria is common in Africa, Central and South America, Asia and several other regions. The disease is spread via mosquito bites, and symptoms include fever and chills. A lack of treatment could even lead to death. Risk increases the more time you spend outdoors, and roughly 1,500 cases occur each year among world travelers.

The first step toward prevention is a conversation with your doctor, the CDC noted. Prescriptions are available that can prevent the disease, and wearing proper clothing can reduce the chances of a mosquito bite. Insect repellent can also be an effective way to prevent malaria. In addition to these measures, you should also be careful when sleeping. Many bites occur during the night, and people are infected while spending time outdoors. With that in mind, it is best to sleep inside screened and air conditioned rooms whenever possible. If your room is exposed to the elements, consider a bed net to prevent mosquitoes from getting to you while you sleep.

Above all else, you should report any symptoms you experience immediately. In some cases, fevers don't present themselves until a year after infection, so keep that in mind once you return to your home country. International health insurance plans can also cover any costs you may have while living and working abroad.