

Chloroquine

What is Chloroquine?

Chloroquine phosphate is an antimalarial drug. A common trade name for this drug is Aralen.

Who should take Chloroquine?

Chloroquine may be recommended for travelers to some parts of North Africa, Central America, temperate South America, the Middle East, and Asia to help prevent malaria. In some countries, malaria is resistant to Chloroquine, and a second drug, Proguanil (also called Paludrine), will be recommended along with it.

What about pregnancy and breastfeeding?

Chloroquine can be taken safely during pregnancy, as the risk of malaria is a far more serious concern. It is best to postpone travel to a malaria-risk area if you are pregnant.

During breastfeeding, a very small amount of drug will be in the breast milk. It will not harm your infant, nor will it provide protection from malaria. Infants need to be given antimalarial drugs for protection as well.

How is Chloroquine taken?

Two Chloroquine phosphate tablets (250 mg each, for a total of 500 mg) are taken once a week, on the same day each week, beginning one to two weeks before arriving in the area with malaria, every week there, and for four weeks after leaving the area. It should be taken on a full stomach to reduce the chances of nausea as a side effect.

The dose for infants and children is based on weight, but should never exceed the adult dose, regardless of the weight of the child.

What might be the side effects if you take chloroquine?

Chloroquine rarely causes serious side effects when taken in the doses needed for malaria prevention. Rare minor side effects may include upset stomach, headache, dizziness, blurred vision and itch. Some people may tolerate it better in divided twice-a-week doses. Taking the drug with a meal helps reduce the side effects. Usually the drug does not need to be stopped.

If you do not tolerate this medication, see a doctor for an alternative antimalarial treatment. There are several options available. Going without antimalarial prevention should be your last choice in most cases.

Do not drive or operate machinery until you know how you will react to this drug. Higher doses of this drug may cause retinopathy (a serious condition causing vision changes) but this is not common in doses used for malaria prevention.

Chloroquine should not be taken if you have:

- known sensitivity to Chloroquine or related compounds,
- a history of severe itch after Chloroquine treatment, or
- a history of epilepsy.

Chloroquine may exacerbate psoriasis in patients with this disease. Since chloroquine may concentrate in the liver, it should be used with caution in patients with hepatic disease.

Protect yourself from mosquito bites:

For more information on how to protect yourself from mosquito bites that may lead to malaria, see the health info sheet on Malaria.