

WEST AFRICAN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

HEALTH CARE GUIDE FOR FOREIGNERS

AN OVERVIEW OF HEALTH PROBLEMS FOR THE FOREIGNER LIVING IN GHANA

Ghana is a rapid developing nation and along with its rapidly developing infrastructure so too is the health care developing. Having said that, there are is a large network of excellent doctors and some great facilities where one can receive good health care. The challenges are:

- Sourcing the right medical professionals
- Ensuring their availability for you health needs 24 hours
- Linking together diagnostics and treatment procedures
- Making the appropriate decisions with regards to your healthcare and in a foreign environment
- Facilitating a rapid evacuation if and when necessary
- Utilizing all the best options in a health crisis
- Ensuring safe and professional ambulance and air rescue

West African Rescue becomes your primary health care manager in Ghana – we are the link to ensure positive outcomes for our members.

Many of the hospitals in Ghana remain underdeveloped and of a third world standard and ending up in the wrong facility or the wrong department for your diagnosis could be detrimental to your health. Ensuring a reliable facility is essential for accurate, early and effective diagnosis so that you can receive immediate and appropriate treatment for the illness you are suffering.

MALARIA - THE DISEASE



Malaria is one of the biggest health concerns in Africa – Ghana is no exception. Millions of people die every year of malaria on the African continent. Early and reliable diagnosis and rapid appropriate treatment is essential in the management of this disease.

THE MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF MALARIA

- Fever
- Headache
- Chills – sensations of hot and then cold
- Diarrhea and vomiting
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Joint pain and weakness

Please bear in mind that whilst this is a summary of the most common symptoms for malaria that malaria can mask other diseases and not present itself in the classic way and can arrange dramatically in its clinical presentation from person to person.

DIAGNOSIS

- Ensure you choose a reliable and reputable laboratory to make your malaria tests.
- If you test negative and remain unwell with malaria like symptoms – do another test.
- The most reliable blood test for the detection of malaria is by taking a blood sample for a thick and thin blood film for malaria parasites at a reputable laboratory.

TREATMENT

- Self diagnosis, self treatment and self medication is not recommended.
- Incorrect treatment of any kind is dangerous to your health and in addition can increase the problem of developing drug resistant strains of malaria.
- The mode of malaria treatment can range from oral drugs, intra muscular injections and intra venous medications depending on the severity of the malaria and your personal medical condition.
- A wide range of anti-malaria drugs exists on the market.
- Drug choice should be carefully chosen by a doctor confident in tropical diseases to ensure appropriate treatment for the specific geographical area of contraction.
- Specific malaria parasites have developed drug resistance which can complicate treatment choices.
- It is always better to confirm a diagnosis first and be treated by a reputable doctor for the management of this disease.

PREVENTION/FACTS AND TIPS

- Some people choose to take prophylactics for malaria - although prophylactics do NOT ensure you will not contract malaria it does lower the chances and also can make the symptoms less severe.
- Should you decide to take malaria prophylactics be careful of your choice – the most affordable is not always the best option.
- Ensure that you are well informed of the side effects of the drugs you are taking and if you develop any side effects – see your doctor immediately –they can be severe.
- Remember the long term use of any drug is not recommended.
- Foreigners coming to Africa for long term periods of time could look at more sustainable methods of prevention related to life style precautions.
- Sleeping under a protective mosquito bed net every night is one of the best mechanical preventions of contracting malaria.
- The malaria mosquito is very small and silent and it is unlikely that you will see it but even in a well protected house with netting and air conditioners – they will be around.
- Ensure that your household has window and door nets.
- Spray your compound approximately 3 monthly with a reputable chemical spraying company – the gutters, garden walls are good places to target.
- Wear light colors and long sleeves and trousers in the evenings and in addition mosquito repellent cream or spray on skin not covered by clothing.
- Your highest risk of being bitten by the malaria mosquito is between dusk and dawn.

STOMACH UPSETS - GASTRO ENTERITIS

- Due to poor levels of hygiene common to all third world countries – stomach upsets and gastro enteritis is very common in Ghana.
- Reduce the risk of contracting stomach complaints by eating only at clean, well known and reputable restaurants.
- Minimize the temptation of exploring with local road side food options.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables well before eating them.
- Educate your cooks and house help to practice high standards of hygiene.
- Severe diarrhea accompanied by fever and vomiting can cause rapid dehydration – contact a doctor immediately for advice.
- Whilst common causes of stomach upsets are usually not serious, there are also frequently outbreaks of typhoid, cholera and dysentery in Ghana which are more serious and require treatment by a physician.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Essential: Yellow fever
Hepatitis A and B
Meningitis
Tetanus

Optional: Rabies (recommended as essential if your work requires you to handle animals)
Typhoid (Not too effective – you can still contract typhoid even after having this vaccine)

OTHER HEALTH RELATED HAZARDS IN GHANA

ROAD SAFETY

- Ghana has a very high motor vehicle accident rate comparable with some of the highest rates in the world.
- Unsafe roads in Ghana compounded by animals, pedestrians, unworthy vehicles on the road, poor or no adherence to traffic rules and badly managed accident scenes and village activity close to the major road sides.



We highly recommend the following, which can reduce your risk and assist you in the event of an accident in Ghana:

- Driving at night outside of Accra should be minimized whenever possible.
- Have a good first aid kit in your car at all times.
- Have regular refresher first aid trainings for you and your drivers.
- Have your essential emergency hotlines numbers available at all times.
- Always wear your safety belt.
- Carry a satellite phone if you travel to areas where network coverage is unreliable.
- Ensure high standards of vehicle maintenance and safety for your company and private vehicles.
- Never driver when tired.

SNAKES AND INSECTS

- Ghana is not the home of many highly dangerous snakes or bugs. There are however many snakes around which can give a nasty bite which requires treatment.
- Always report any snake or scorpion bite to a doctor and seek appropriate treatment.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing especially footwear when walking in the bush.
- Anti venom can be scarce at times but the WARA clinics stock a regular supply of anti venom.

OTHER NASTIES

- Fresh water lakes, rivers and dams in Ghana host bilharzias parasites (shistosoma) – these can cause chronic illness and it is difficult to detect and treat.
- It is not recommended to swim in these waters – if you engage in activities in high risk water environment it is recommended to do annual blood tests to check for bilharzias.
- Other parasites are common in Ghana regular – ie. 6 monthly de-worming procedures with normal de-wormer are highly recommended.

Don't forget to always.....

- Drink plenty of water recommended 6 – 8 glasses per day.
- Keep healthy by being fit – a fit body is a healthy body and mind.
- Build physical fitness into your weekly routine by doing a minimum of 45 minute of physical exercise at least three times a week.
- Eat right – regular healthy balanced meals from all the major food groups.
- Sleep enough – recommended between 6 – 8 hours undisturbed sleep for adults.
- Take out enough time for fun and relaxation – this is an essential component of leading a balanced life style for optimal mental and physical health.
- Stimulants such as coffee, habits such a smoking, drugs and abuse of alcohol will affect your health in a negative way.
- Your emotional well being and stress can affect your health negatively. If you have an emotional problem - seek support through a professional counselor.
- Living in a foreign country where your family and long term friends are not around to support you in a crisis is not easy – professional help can assist you at such times.
- If you are over 45 years old it is recommended that you have an annual full medical check up.