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World Malaria Day April 25th 2011 - intending travellers should take protective measures against malaria

Among EU Member States reporting malaria data to the European Centre for Disease Control, Ireland had the third highest incidence rate for imported malaria in 2008, third only to France and the United Kingdom.¹ Compared to the number of cases of malaria notified prior to 2006, malaria notifications in Ireland in 2010 remained at elevated levels with 82 cases notified. Moreover, one Irish resident died as a result of their illness, a woman of African origin who was resident in Ireland for several years but who was exposed on a return visit to Africa.

The group most affect in Ireland continued to be African immigrants and their families who were exposed while returning to their countries of origin to visit family and friends. This almost certainly reflects the greater frequency with which this group travels to malarious areas; and reflects also Ireland's increasing importance as a destination for those emigrating from English speaking West Africa. Seventy per cent of cases with a known reason for travel in 2010 (46/66) cited 'visiting family in country of origin', with at least 83% (n=38) of these being of African origin.

Unusually, the second most common reason for travel this year was being an 'Irish citizen living abroad' (10 cases -15% of cases with known reason for travel in 2010). This compares with a total of 6 cases listing this as their reason for 'travel' over the previous four years. At least six of these ten cases had been living in an endemic country for one year or more. There were only two cases associated with holiday travel in 2010, down from between five and thirteen annually reported in the period 2006-2009.

Nigeria remained the country most frequently visited -50% of cases (n=41). Ghana was reported as the country of infection for eight cases (10%). The remaining cases reporting travel to other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa or to Asia. And as in previous years, *P. falciparum* was responsible for the majority of malaria cases reported, most likely because *P. falciparum* is the most common form of malaria acquired in Africa and the majority of Irish cases are acquired there.

In recent years in Ireland, there has been concern about the reported number of paediatric malaria cases. In 2010, 11 paediatric malaria cases were notified compared to between 16 and 26 cases annually in the previous four years. Eight of these reported 'visiting family in country of origin as their reason for travel, while one was a new entrant.

The small decline in case numbers in 2010 (9% decrease compared to 2009) in particular among children is welcome, however, efforts should continue in the education of the travelling public about the steps that can be taken to minimise their risk of contracting malaria while overseas.

We would like to take this opportunity on World Malaria Day to issue a reminder about a poster which can be downloaded from the HPSC website for display in GP surgeries, maternity hospitals, paediatric hospitals and A&E departments, advising immigrant families travelling to Africa to consult their doctor about malaria before travelling. A leaflet, available in English and French, has also been produced that highlights the value

Dr D O'Flanagan, HPSC
(Managing editor)
Dr L Kyne, RCPI (Paed)
Prof C Bradley, ICGP
Dr N O'Sullivan, ISCM
Mr E O'Kelly, NVRL
Dr P McKeown, HPSC
Dr L Thornton, FPHMI
Prof C Bergin, IDSI
M Kelly, HPSC
(Editor)

**Health Protection
Surveillance Centre**
25-27 Middle Gardiner St
Dublin 1

Tel: +353 (0) 1 8765300
Fax: +353 (0) 1 8561299
info@hpsc.ie
www.hpsc.ie

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of antimalarial prophylaxis and protection against mosquito bites. The poster and leaflet are available [here](#).

Patricia Garvey and Paul McKeown, HPSC

References

1. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Annual Epidemiological Report on Communicable Diseases in Europe 2010. Stockholm: ECDC; 2010. ISBN 978-92-9193-222-1. Available [here](#).

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