

MN Malaria Stories: Anyone can get malaria

REBECCA JOHNSON'S TRANSCRIPT

Spending time with my family overseas is so precious, I never want to have to worry about malaria and other diseases.

[On-screen text]

Rebecca's Story: Anyone can get malaria

Several years ago, before traveling to Sierra Leone and Gambia for a month to visit family, I went to a travel clinic and they gave me medication to prevent malaria.

[On-screen text]

You can get malaria again.

I had malaria when I was a child, and I knew I needed to protect myself so I wouldn't get it again.

I felt so lucky to spend time with my family. I visited my brother in Freetown, my sister and her family in Bo, and my dad and other siblings in a village to the East.

Most nights we would stay outside until 11 sitting around a fire together and listening to elders tell family stories. It's one of my favorite parts of my visits home.

During my trip, I shared some of the extra medication when my family asked because malaria medication that's sold in the village markets is often fake or poor quality. One thing led to another, and I ran out of meds about two weeks before the end of my trip. I did use a bed net most nights, but there wasn't an extra one for me at my sister's house.

Near the end of my trip, I was sitting and talking with my sister, and suddenly, I started getting chills.

[On-screen text]

Chills, Fever, Headaches, Stomach Pain, Vomiting

Then came the fever, headaches, stomach pain, and vomiting, the symptoms I remember from having malaria as a child.

I was staying with my brother, who is a well-respected nurse in Freetown and treats cases of malaria often. He immediately recognized that it was malaria and gave me quinine. I felt a little better a couple days later, but then it got much worse again.

Eventually I felt well enough to fly back to Minnesota, but when I got home my symptoms came back again in full force. I got such terrible headaches that I needed to leave work. I was sleeping

all day on the weekends. When I went to a clinic, they did some lab work and diagnosed me with pneumonia. I received outpatient treatment for symptoms for a month, but still had waves of malaria after the pneumonia was treated.

My symptoms slowly went away, but I was never tested for malaria. I wish I would have been more adamant about ruling out malaria.

[On-screen text in a word cloud]

Malaria, Disease, Prevent, Travel, Fever, Reinfection, Illness, Serious, Stomach Pain, Medication, Protection, Mosquito Bite, Bed Net, Repellent, Treatment, Clinic, Parasite, Headaches

I was afraid of being quarantined or isolated because previously I wasn't allowed to visit one of my friends when he was hospitalized with malaria after coming back from Sierra Leone.

I know from personal experience that anyone can get malaria, even if you've had it before. Any time I travel back home, I will always take the medication as prescribed and make sure to have enough for my entire trip and the period after.

I will still sit outside and share stories with my family, but now I will use bug spray and travel with my own bed net since they are affordable. Both are good ways to help prevent malaria.

I care deeply about the health of my community. I'm sharing my story so that other people visiting family and friends back home don't have the same experience I had. Please protect yourself from malaria.

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3/23/23

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