Malaria

What is it?

- Malaria is caused by a family of parasites (Plasmodium) that grow in mosquitoes and in human blood. Most often we get malaria from a mosquito bite. 
- There are 4 types of this parasite that may cause illness and death. 
- Symptoms usually appear about 12 to 14 days after being exposed and may include:
  - stomach pain
  - diarrhea
  - nausea and vomiting
  - high fevers
  - chills and sweats
  - headache
  - dizziness
  - muscle aches
  - poor appetite
  - tiredness
  - low blood pressure
- Some malaria is more severe and can cause:
  - anemia (decrease in red blood cells)
  - extreme tiredness
  - delirium
  - unconsciousness
  - convulsions
  - coma
  - kidney failure
  - fluid on the lung
- Malaria is not found in Canadian mosquitoes. However, 1 million Canadians travel to areas that have a high rate of malaria every year. This results in 350 to 1,000 infections a year in Canada.

How is it spread?

- The most common way malaria is spread is through a bite from an infected mosquito
- It can also spread from infected blood during a blood transfusion or from mother to child during pregnancy
Is there treatment for it?
- Yes. If recognized early, malaria infection can be cured.
- The medication chosen by your doctor depends on:
  - the type of malaria
  - the area you travelled to or visited when you contracted malaria
  - the severity of the illness
  - your medical history
  - if you are pregnant

What can be done to prevent the spread of it?
- If you are travelling to an area where malaria is common, you should take medicine to prevent it. Contact your family doctor or travel clinic.
- Where malaria is present make sure to:
  - stay away from fields, forests and swamps
  - use permethrin-treated mosquito netting when sleeping
  - wear light coloured clothing
  - wear long sleeves and pants
  - put on mosquito repellent containing DEET on exposed skin
  - apply sunscreen first, if needed, wait 20 minutes, and then apply DEET
  - try to stay indoors at night

For more information
World Health Organization

Stop the spread of germs and infection. Clean your hands.