

Testing of your blood for **malaria**



Meet Anna. Anna loves to travel but that doesn't stop her from donating regularly.

Malaria – a global problem

Malaria remains a serious health problem in over 100 countries around the world. Fortunately, Australia is not one of them.

However, our love of travel means we need to take care to ensure it doesn't become a problem here – particularly in our blood supply.

The Australian Red Cross Blood Service tests a selected group of donors to detect whether they have been exposed to malaria.

Why do we test for malaria?

While the symptoms of malaria can be severe, it is possible to have been infected without suffering a serious illness.

If you are infected with malaria, your body's immune system produces antibodies to malaria and these can remain in your blood for years afterwards, possibly masking the symptoms of any current infection.

We need to test to ensure malaria is not passed on via a blood transfusion.

Before testing began, if you had been in a malaria risk country or had recovered from the disease, we were only able to use the plasma component of your blood donation for up to 3 years.

Testing means we can reduce this period from 3 years to as little as 4 months, after which we can then use other components such as red cells and platelets, if the test is negative.

Who does this affect?

To ensure our blood supplies are free of malaria, we test the blood of donors who may have been exposed to the disease when they visited or resided in a country where the World Health Organisation has determined that malaria is widespread (see map).

Your blood donation will be tested if:

- you visited an at-risk country in the previous three years
- you lived in an at-risk country/s for six or more months continuously at any stage in your life; or
- you have ever had malaria

Before we can test, 4 months must have passed since you left the at-risk country or recovered from the disease.

What is my risk of having malaria?

The risk of contracting malaria, while in a malaria risk country, mainly relates to the amount of time you spend there.

For most travellers, this risk is generally very low and we expect them to have a negative or 'clear' result when tested.

People who have lived continuously in a malaria risk area/s for 6 months or longer will have a slightly greater risk of having contracted malaria. In some cases, these donors may not even exhibit any symptoms.

How will I know my test result?

As with the other routine screening tests we perform on blood donations, donors who have a negative or clear result will not receive a letter from us.

If your blood donation test provides an abnormal result, we perform additional tests to decide if further medical investigation is required.

As it takes some time to perform all the necessary tests, it may take between 2 and 4 weeks for the letter to be sent to the small number of donors who have an abnormal test result.

If your tests show that you have been exposed to malaria, you will be notified by letter.

What if I receive a letter?

If you receive a letter from us, it does not mean you have malaria. Usually the tests indicate you only have antibodies for malaria present in your blood but do not have a current infection.

When we send you a letter it will include an information sheet and a letter you can take to your GP for your medical file. There will also be contact details for one of our Medical Officers who will be happy to talk either to you or your GP about the test result. If you receive a letter, please call us to confirm receipt.

In the extremely rare situation where blood donors are identified as potentially having a current malaria infection, we notify them directly and refer them to their GP or appropriate medical specialists who have expertise in the investigation and management of patients with malaria.

Am I still eligible to donate blood?

If you have malaria antibodies present in your blood, we will only be able to use the plasma component of your donation for transfusion purposes for at least 3 years.

We encourage you to consider donating just the plasma component in your blood. For more information about this, please ask for a brochure.

If you are unable to donate plasma, your whole blood donations will continue to provide a valuable source of plasma.

In the extremely rare situation where a blood donor has been diagnosed with a current malaria infection, they cannot donate until they have been appropriately treated and have fully recovered.

Anna's story

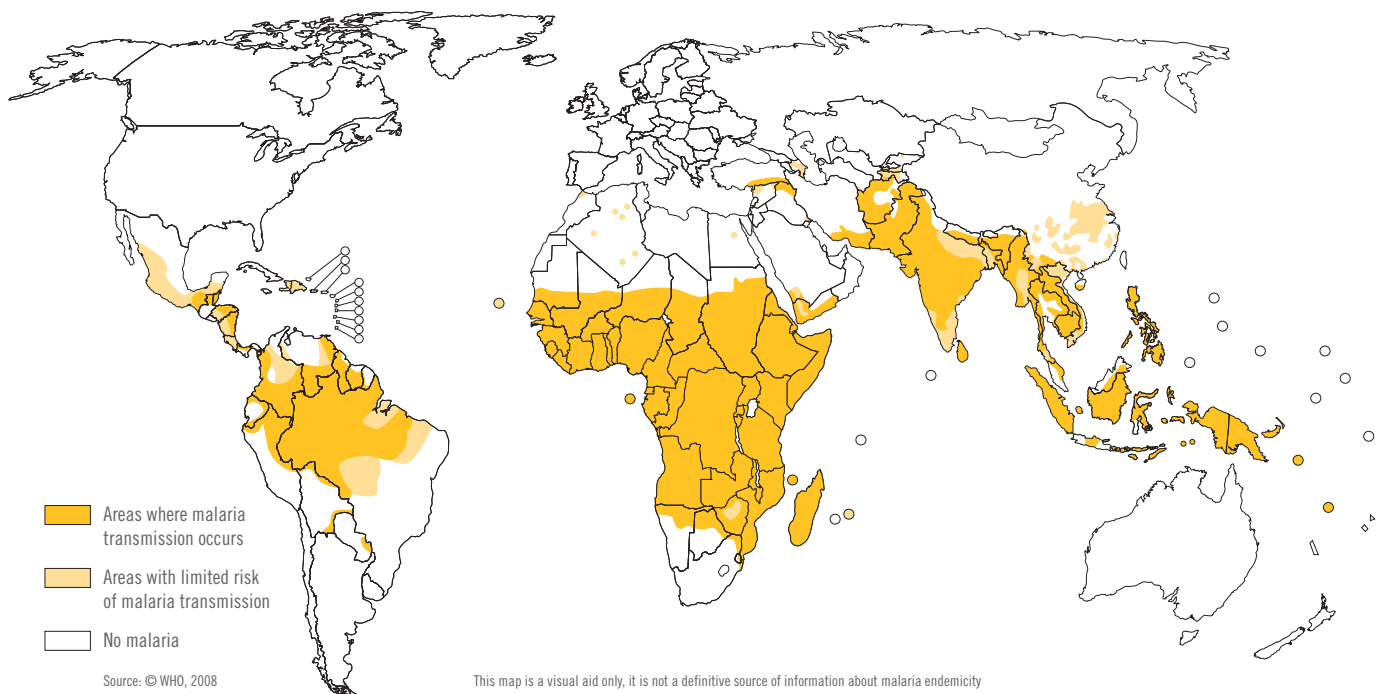
Like many other young Australians, Anna loves to travel and see the world.

She has visited many amazing places and enjoyed lots of adventures – some of which have been in areas where there is a risk of malaria transmission.

Anna also likes helping others and is a regular blood donor.

To make sure Anna's valuable donations help as many people as possible, we test her blood donations to ensure they don't contain malaria.

By testing for malaria, we ensure Anna can continue to enjoy seeing the world – while still making a difference in her community.



For more information call **13 14 95**
or visit donateblood.com.au