

Deployment Health and Family Readiness Library



Mefloquine (Lariam ®)

For Leaders

Important Facts

- Mefloquine is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prevent malaria, especially where malaria has become resistant to other medications.
- Be sure that service members receive a Medication Guide detailing possible side effects of this medication before taking mefloquine.
- Advise service members to avoid using alcohol while taking mefloquine because it can interfere with the medicine's effectiveness and result in more serious side effects.
- Rare instances of suicide have been reported among those taking mefloquine but not proven to be a result of taking the medication. Remain alert to talk or signs of suicide and refer such service members for a medical evaluation.
- Advise female service members not to use mefloquine if they are pregnant and that there may be health risks if she becomes pregnant within three months after taking her last dose.

How is mefloquine used?

Mefloquine is one of a few medicines recommended by the CDC to prevent malaria, especially in areas where malaria has become resistant to other medications. It offers the advantage of being taken once a week rather than once a day. You should closely supervise service members to ensure that they begin taking the medicine at least one week before deployment or as instructed by your unit's health care provider. Ensure they continue taking it once a week during deployment, and take it for 4 weeks more after leaving a malaria area. It may be easier to remember and supervise if it is taken on the same day of each week. This will also make the medicine more effective.

Alcohol may interfere with the medicine's effectiveness and cause more serious side effects. Advise service members against alcohol use if they are taking mefloquine.

What information should my service members receive about mefloquine?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) developed a Medication Guide for mefloquine in 2003 in collaboration with its manufacturer. This Medication Guide provides information on the risks of malaria, the risks and benefits of taking mefloquine to prevent malaria, and the rare but potentially serious side effects, including mental side effects, associated with this medicine. The

Medication Guide must be given to anyone prescribed mefloquine. The Medication Guide is also available at: <http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/SAFETY/2003/LariamMedGuide.pdf>.

Advise service members to take medicines properly and to know the potential side effects. You should visit your service members' clinic and ensure all mefloquine users receive both the Medication Guide and counseling on proper use and potential side effects.

What are common side effects?

Most people do not experience side effects from taking Mefloquine. Side effects occur at rates similar to other anti-malaria medicines. These side effects can include inability to sleep, unusual dreams, lightheadedness, headaches, dizziness, visual disturbances, ringing in the ear, rash, irritability, and gastrointestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Vomiting and nausea are the most common side effects.

You can help to prevent vomiting by ensuring that service members take mefloquine with a meal and at least 8 ounces (a cup) of water. If you notice these side effects in someone in your unit, send the service member to a health care provider as soon as possible.

What about behavioral side effects?

The relationship between mefloquine and suicide has been a source of controversy and public discussion. Service members may be familiar with this controversy and raise questions or concerns. These health concerns should be addressed openly, honestly and with appropriate sensitivity. Such questions and concerns may constitute a sound reason to seek medical care.

Rare instances of suicide in patients taking mefloquine have been reported but no scientific studies have proven that taking mefloquine is associated with suicide, suicidal ideas, suicide attempts, or any other violent behavior. Even so, you should be alert for any signs of talk or activity related to suicide and immediately send service members that you are concerned about for a medical evaluation.

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A collaborative effort between the Air Force Institute for Operational Health, the Deployment Health Clinical Center, Force Health Protection and Readiness, the Navy Environmental Health Center, the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, and the OUSD(P&R)/Military Family and Community Policy



Other rare behavioral side effects may include anxiety, paranoia (suspicion of everyone), depression, agitation, restlessness, mood changes, panic attacks, forgetfulness, hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there), aggression, and psychotic behavior (delusions or decreased "reality testing"). Potential side effects that can impair reaction time and thinking include nerve problems, confusion and disorientation, convulsions, psychosis, nightmares, dizziness, and loss of balance.

Normal reactions to deployments and combat stress may be similar to both the common and behavioral side effects of mefloquine. Send service members showing changes in behavior for a medical evaluation — especially if they operate heavy equipment or carry a weapon while taking the medication.

Who should not take mefloquine?

Service members should not take mefloquine if they have depression or had depression recently, have had recent mental illness, have had seizures, or are allergic to mefloquine or related medications such as quinine or quinidine. Send these service members to a health care provider for evaluation.

Can mefloquine be used during pregnancy or breastfeeding?

Send pregnant female service members in your unit to a health care provider to determine the most effective and appropriate anti-malarial medication. Advise women of childbearing age to use a reliable birth control method while taking the medicine and for up to three months after the last dose to avoid getting pregnant. Pregnant women should discuss all medications, including mefloquine, with a health care provider prior to use.

What should service members tell their health care providers?

Service members must tell their health care provider about any history of:

- Depression, mental illness, or seizures.
- Allergies to mefloquine or related medications.
- Heart disease.
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding.
- Liver problems.
- Medication, including non-prescription medications and dietary or herbal supplements.

Also advise them to discuss with their provider their alcohol, consumption habits, since that may interfere with mefloquine's effectiveness.

Blood donations

Advise service members that if they spent six months or less in a malarial area, they cannot donate blood for one year after leaving that area. If they spent more than six months in a malarial area or if they had malaria, they cannot donate blood for three years after leaving the area or after successful malaria treatment.

What else will help to prevent malaria?

No medicine is 100 percent effective. Therefore, ensure that service members carry out prevention efforts including:

- Eliminating mosquito-breeding sites by emptying water collected in outdoor containers or debris.
- Remaining in well-screened areas, particularly at dawn, dusk, and early evening when mosquitoes are most active.
- Using mosquito bed nets.
- Wearing loose clothing that covers most of the body.
- Soaking or spraying bed nets and tents with permethrin.
- Wearing permethrin treated clothing with DEET insect repellents on exposed skin.
- Applying insect repellent that contains DEET (N,N-diethylmetatoluamide) to any exposed skin when traveling in environments with biting insects.

Where Do I Get More Information?

Air Force Institute for Operational Health (AFIOH)

Phone: (888) 232-3764

<http://www.brooks.af.mil/afioh/>

DoD Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)

Phone: (866) 559-1627

<http://www.pdhealth.mil/>

DoD Force Health Protection & Readiness (FHP & R)

Phone: (800) 497-6261

<http://fhp.osd.mil>

Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC)

Phone: (757) 953-0700

<http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil>

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM)

Phone: (800) 222-9698

<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil>

Food and Drug Administration Medication Guide

<http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/SAFETY/2003/LariamMedGuide.pdf>

Medication Label

http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/SAFETY/2003/Lariam_PI.pdf

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