

Malaria cases on the rise in Belgium

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Dit is de omschrijving

In 2018, the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) recorded no less than 351 Belgians who contracted malaria while journeying abroad. These are patients who were treated at ITM, or whose diagnosis was confirmed by the Institute's reference laboratory. The number of cases in Belgium has been creeping up for several years. In 2015, 275 people were diagnosed with malaria, about 30% less than last year. The most important message to all travellers remains: prevention is better than cure.

One of the causes of the resurgence in the disease is the growing number of Belgians with African roots who return to their homeland to visit relatives. "Many believe that they are immune to malaria and do not take preventive malaria pills during their journey. Anyone who grew up in a malaria endemic area builds up a certain resistance, but it diminishes quickly after a few years outside the area," says Prof Emmanuel Bottieau of ITM's travel clinic.

Another possible cause might be due to the "Stromae effect". During his African tour in 2015, the well-known Belgian singer took Lariam, preventive malaria tablets that are only exceptionally prescribed. Stromae or Paul Van Haver suffered some adverse side-effects of these pills, which can cause anxiety and depression. "Such stories deter travellers from taking preventive malaria pills. Malaria is perfectly treatable, but there are still Belgians who die from it after returning from a journey. It is essential to protect yourself properly during your trip by taking preventive medication and using DEET sprays and mosquito nets," says Bottieau.

The number of malaria cases fell worldwide in the last decade. While the disease is less common in Southeast Asian and Latin American regions, it is still highly prevalent in West and Central Africa.

More about malaria: <https://www.itg.be/E/travel-health/malaria>