



香港商船資訊

HONG KONG MERCHANT SHIPPING INFORMATION NOTE

Fatal cases of malaria happened on board Hong Kong-registered ships

To: Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters and Officers and Crew

Summary

Two fatal cases of malaria happened on Hong Kong-registered cargo ships operating in African waters over the past two years. This Note draws the attention of shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers and crew to the lessons learnt from these accidents. This Note supersedes HKMSIN No. 16/2016.

The Incident

1. Case one: On 12 October 2024, a container ship departed from Walvis Bay, Namibia, and bound for Singapore. Two days after departure, an Ordinary Seaman (the Seaman) reported feeling unwell. As his symptoms persisted, the master subsequently notified the company and requested remote medical assistance. Despite the administration of medication for fever, the Seaman's condition deteriorated. The ship diverted to Madagascar for an emergency medical evacuation on 17 October 2024. Unfortunately, the Seaman succumbed to the illness prior to the arrival of the shore medical team. The death certificate stated the cause of death as severe malaria.

2. Case two: On 15 February 2026, while a bulk carrier was in Lagos, Nigeria, an Engine Cadet (the Cadet) on board developed a fever followed by stomach pain. Medication was administered, but the symptoms persisted. Following a severe deterioration in the Cadet's condition, the master reported a medical emergency to the company on 21 February 2026. Acting on advice from a shore medical practitioner, the Cadet took the prescribed medicine, which provided temporary relief. However, his condition subsequently worsened rapidly, and he was found unresponsive in his cabin. He was evacuated to a shore hospital, where he was certified dead on 24 February 2026. Laboratory testing confirmed a positive result for malaria.

Lessons Learnt

3. Ship management companies and masters should ensure the onboard malaria prevention and control measures are strictly complied with. Particular attention should be

drawn to the following:

- (a) always consult the information and guidelines¹ provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the latest updates. Special reference should be made to Module 3 “Malaria”² of the WHO publication *International Travel and Health*, particularly the “ABCDE” principles of malaria protection:
 - i. be **A**ware of the risk, the incubation period, the possibility of delayed onset and the main symptoms;
 - ii. avoid being **B**itten by mosquitos, especially between dusk and dawn;
 - iii. take antimalarial drugs (**C**hemoprophylaxis) when appropriate, at regular intervals to prevent acute malaria attacks;
 - iv. immediately seek **D**iagnosis and treatment if a fever develops one week or more after entering an area where there is a malaria risk and up to three months (or, rarely, later) after departure from a risk area; and
 - v. avoid outdoor activities in **E**nvironments that are mosquito breeding places, such as swamps or marshy areas, especially in the late evenings and at night.
- (b) before a ship enters malaria-endemic areas, particularly the ports in Africa, Southeast Asia and Central America, the master and all crew members should be fully aware of and implement the following precautionary measures:
 - i. conduct pre-arrival training for all crew members to enhance awareness of malaria risks and necessary protective measures;
 - ii. take appropriate preventive actions, including wearing protective clothing and applying mosquito repellent, to prevent mosquito bites;
 - iii. ensure the ship is equipped with a sufficient and appropriate supply of antimalarial drugs for the ports of call; and
 - iv. if a crew member exhibits symptoms suspected to be malaria, the company and master should recognise the potentially fatal risk and arrange for shore-based diagnosis and treatment as soon as possible.

¹ https://www.who.int/health-topics/malaria#tab=tab_1

² <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/6b48bd59-d7b3-4073-a42c-b8a005e4cb1c/content>

4. The attention of shipowners, ship managers, ship operators, masters, officers and crew is drawn to the lessons learnt above.
5. For further enquiry, please contact via email: ss-mai@mardep.gov.hk.

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