



DANGEROUS DRUGS RISKING LIVES

Some private clinics & pharmacies dispensing wrong treatment for malaria

It has been discovered that several private outlets in Honiara are dispensing the incorrect treatment for malaria, risking lives and jeopardizing the Ministry of Health's Malaria Control Program.

Earlier this year, the Solomon Islands switched to using a new type of treatment for malaria, based on the latest best practice evidence from health experts around the world. The new treatment, which is based around a drug called 'Coartem[®]', is more effective, faster and safer than the previous treatments available. All public clinics and hospitals have now switched to this new therapy, which is being well received.

Unfortunately, another drug has appeared on the private market, being sold by several private outlets in Honiara, which is placing lives at risk. This drug, called 'ARTEMEDINE[®]', which comes in a blue and white box, only contains one active ingredient, 'Artemether', and is not enough to treat malaria. Julie Zinihite, Principal Pharmacist at NRH, explains;

"Coartem contains 2 ingredients – Artemether AND Lumefantrine. Together, they are very effective at treating malaria. If you don't use both, there is a high chance the malaria won't be cured. Worse than that, if Artemether is used alone, a dangerous effect called 'Resistance' can occur", Julie said.

"Resistance is when an infection learns to beat a drug," explains Dr Lyndes Wini, of the National Malaria Program, "The drug may work for a little while but eventually, the infection learns how to survive and the drug stops working. This can happen very quickly and once it does, resistant parasites can spread from person to person. Using TWO active ingredients lowers the chances of resistance happening".

The World Health Organisation is very concerned about the risk of resistance and is urging people to use the correct treatment. Dr Rabindra Abeyasinghe, of the WHO says, "Artemether tablets are inappropriate if used alone. We urge all patients to seek the correct treatment and to get a second opinion if offered 'Artemedine[®]'".

It is feared that patients' lives are being put at risk by this dangerous practice and the National Malaria Program is worried that resistance to the new treatment will come to the Solomon Islands. Dr Wini says, "we have seen some great improvements in the treatment of malaria in this country and infection rates continue to go down. If people continue to receive 'Artemedine[®]', then we may again begin to lose the fight against malaria".

Coartem[®] is available at all public clinics, NRH and some private pharmacies and private clinics. The Ministry of Health is urging anyone who has received 'Artemedine[®]' to return it and ask for **Coartem[®]**.

Extra note: Please note that anybody with Pf malaria must take Coartem only. Anybody with Pv malaria must take Coartem first and then follow up with Primaquine (if safe to do so). Please contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for specific prescribing advice or contact the national Medicines Information Centre (24697) for advice on any medicine.

For further information, please contact

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