

Mefloquine and doxycycline malaria prophylaxis in Australian soldiers in East Timor

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Abstract

Objectives: To describe the tolerability of mefloquine in Australian soldiers for malaria prophylaxis, including a comparison with doxycycline.

Design: Open-label, prospective study and cross-sectional questionnaire and interview.

Setting and participants: Two contingents of Australian soldiers, each deployed to East Timor for peacekeeping duties over a 6-month period (April 2001–October 2001 and October 2001–May 2002).

Outcome measures: Withdrawals during the study; adverse events relating to mefloquine prophylaxis; willingness to use mefloquine again on deployment.

Results: Of 1157 soldiers starting on mefloquine, 75 (6.5%) withdrew because of adverse responses to the drug. There were three serious adverse events of a neuropsychiatric nature, possibly relating to mefloquine. Fifty-seven per cent of soldiers using mefloquine prophylaxis reported at least one adverse event, compared with 56% using doxycycline. The most commonly reported adverse effects of both drugs were sleep disturbance, headache, tiredness and nausea. Of the 968 soldiers still taking mefloquine at the end of their deployments, 94% indicated they would use mefloquine again. Of 388 soldiers taking doxycycline prophylaxis who were deployed with the first mefloquine study contingent, 89% indicated they would use doxycycline again.

Conclusions: Mefloquine was generally well tolerated by Australian soldiers and should continue to be used for those intolerant of doxycycline.