

Good afternoon all.

As some of you know I recently got nailed properly by a tsetse fly and ended up with sleeping sickness. Some have then later asked what the symptoms were like. Not many of us seem to have much info on sleeping sickness even though we spend much of our time in areas that have it. I'm no expert but want to share what I learned on the symptoms that I had and how it all progressed. Sleeping sickness is very nasty and the sooner you get diagnosed the better the chance of surviving it. I will also share photos of the bite site chancre development though it must be noted that not every case develops a chancre.

On me it started 2 weeks after a visit to the valley, on a Wednesday afternoon (day 1) where a red spot that was slightly tender developed on my hand. I thought nothing of it. The next morning Thursday (day 2) the spot was more tender and after a couple of hours around 8.30am I started feeling ill.

Same bad feeling like you have with malaria. Sore muscles, joints and bones. Nausea. Mild Headache. I left it till the afternoon and went to the SES clinic where all staff were busy out on emergencies so I went to Fairview. I had at this stage a strong suspicion that it was sleeping sickness due to previous knowledge. At fairview the doctor had no much clue about what sleeping sickness is. I informed him to test me for malaria and sleeping sickness.

Unfortunately he ordered a sleeping sickness DNA or gene test. Results for this takes 3-5 days and is not advisable for immediate diagnosing. Sleeping sickness is easy to diagnose on a fresh blood smear. Much easier to see than malaria.

Anyway doctor sent me home with malaria meds and antibiotics because blood tests indicated an infection. Malaria test they said was negative but gave me meds anyway. He said they would let me know when results came for sleeping sickness test.

Fever and symptoms that night got worse than normal for malaria. Headache was very strong.

Friday (day 3) still felt bad but sort of stable bad. By lunch time lymph nodes in elbow and armpit on bite site arm got swollen and painful. Swollen lymph nodes very common indication for sleeping sickness. Went to SES clinic. Doctor saw me this time and took blood test. Doctor then referred me to CFB that evening to get blood test done. They prefer to test for sleeping sickness at night. CFB have a 24 hour open lab and would be able to give me results immediately.

That evening at CFB they did tests and an hour later results were out. I had sleeping sickness and malaria on the same time. They next day I was flown to JHB and got treatment for it there.

So here's my advice:

If you have been in a tsetse area within the past two months and start getting symptoms like malaria, then have sleeping sickness in mind. (I presume most have tried what malaria feels like). In many cases us PH's self medicate for malaria. If you are not near a hospital and there is no improvement after 1-2 days of self treatment for malaria then get to a hospital that can test for sleeping sickness and ask them to test for it.

If you get a red spot anywhere on your body and get symptoms like malaria then get tested for sleeping sickness. Insure its a blood smear test they do for immediate results.

The sooner you catch it the bigger the chance of surviving. If you wait more than 7 days chances are you won't make it.

Symptoms I had:

Worse fever than malaria

Aching muscle, joints and bones

Strong headache from day 3

Swollen lymph nodes

Red spot developing into chancre (People often falsely think it's a spider bite)

Make sure that it is experienced doctors that do the treatment and in proper facilities. The treatment itself is nasty and can kill you.

Also I think it's a good idea to advise clients about it. WITHOUT alarming the client, in a nice way, explain that if they get ill when they get home to insure that they inform their doctor they have been in a tsetse fly area.

Hope this was some good info to know for everyone.

Stay safe out there and remember it,s not only buffaloes that can knock you out.

