

# Co-Infection with Chikungunya and Malaria: A Case Report

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## Co-Infection with Chikungunya and Malaria: A Case Report

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## Consent for Publication

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### Key clinical message:

Healthcare providers in regions endemic with similar clinical manifestations' diseases must consider investigating co-infections. However, this should be implemented without increasing the socioeconomic burden on patients through subsidizing laboratory test and integrating robust and cost-effective diagnostic tools. This should be supplemented by strengthening the differential diagnosis capabilities by improving the knowledge about the clinical presentation of endemic diseases.

### Abstract:

Chikungunya and malaria are mosquito-borne diseases that impose considerable health burdens, particularly in endemic regions of Sub-Saharan Africa such as Sudan. This report details a case of co-infection in a 35-year-old male patient presenting with an 8-day history of fever, chills, rigors, vomiting, and musculoskeletal pain. Laboratory investigations confirmed infections with *Plasmodium falciparum* and Chikungunya virus. The overlap in clinical presentations of these diseases complicates diagnosis and treatment, highlighting the necessity for heightened clinical awareness and robust laboratory capabilities. Effective management of co-infections requires enhanced diagnostic infrastructure, improved awareness among healthcare providers, and integrated vector control strategies. This case underscores the importance of accurate diagnosis and tailored treatment protocols in regions where multiple vector-borne diseases coexist.

### Keywords

Chikungunya; malaria; co-infection; Sub-Saharan Africa; diagnostic challenges; public health.

## 1 Introduction

Malaria and arboviral diseases including Chikungunya are major mosquito-borne diseases that challenge health system and pose substantial threats to human health, and socioeconomic stability and development, particularly in under-resourced endemic countries mainly in Africa [1 - 8]. The co-circulation and dual burden of both diseases is increasingly prevalent in Africa including Sudan, where the interplay of these infections exhausted the fragile health system, complicated diseases prevention and control as well as health outcomes of the local population [5, 9 - 18].

Malaria in human is mainly caused by one or more of five species of *Plasmodium* parasites, primarily transmitted by various species of Anopheles mosquitoes including *Anopheles arabiensis*, *An. funestus*, *An. pharoensis*, and *An. stephensi* [14, 19, 20]. *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax* are the predominant species affecting the majority of humans at risk of malaria [21 - 23]. Conversely, Chikungunya fever result from infection with Chikungunya virus belong to alphavirus belong to the *Togaviridae* family, primarily spread by Aedes mosquitoes [24 - 26].

In tropical regions, the geographic distribution and transmission areas for these diseases frequently overlap, leading to a heightened risk of co-infections [1- 5, 27 - 30]. Several factors, including conflicts, climate change, globalization, urbanization, deforestation, and the establishment of agricultural settlements in peri-urban areas enhance the spread of invasive disease vectors and emergence of infectious diseases [31 - 38]. These factors increase the environmental suitability, population vulnerability, and health systems susceptibility to the emergence and development of diseases outbreaks [39 - 42].

Sudan, characterized by its diverse ecological zones, limited resources, and fragile health system, this increased the country vulnerability to wide range of endemic diseases [43 - 54]. Among these, malaria continues to be a leading cause of morbidity and mortality, and it's co-circulating with viral infections such as Hepatitis viruses and several arboviruses like dengue, Rift valley fever [30, 55 - 57]. The clinical presentations of these diseases frequently overlap, which eventually challenges the limited local diagnostic capacity [1,5,10,11, 30, 55].

In this communication, we present a case of Chikungunya and malaria co-infection in Sudan. Documenting challenges and best practices in investigating co-infection in high burden and limited resources country; Sudan. Through this case report, we aim to enhance awareness among healthcare providers and foster improved differential diagnosis and diagnostic protocols to coop up the rapidly growing prevalence and burden of infectious diseases.

## 2 Case History

A 35-year-old male from Kassala State presented in September 2024 with 8-day history of fever, chills, rigors, vomiting, and severe musculoskeletal pain. Upon examination, his temperature was 39.4°C, with a heart rate of 117 beats per minute (bpm), and hypotension evidenced by a blood pressure reading of 94/55 mmHg. The tourniquet test yielded a positive result, indicating a potential bleeding disorder.

## 3 Methods

A blood sample was collected for laboratory investigations to ascertain the cause of his symptoms. A peripheral blood smear identified both trophozoite and schizont stages of *Plasmodium falciparum*, confirming the involvement of malaria infection. Additionally, appreciating the epidemiological risk due to the endemicity and recent outbreaks of arboviruses in the area, a blood sample was collected and the patient was screened for arboviral diseases including dengue, Chikungunya, Yellow fever and Rift valley fever using RT-PCR. The result confirmed a concurrent infection with Chikungunya virus. While testing negative for other arboviral diseases. Additionally, the laboratory assessment showed thrombocytopenia, anemia, and lymphocytosis. Detailed laboratory results are presented in Table 1.

## 4 Conclusion and Results

To stabilize the patient's condition, he was hospitalized and administered a bolus of normal saline, which significantly improved his hemodynamic status. Continued hydration was maintained, and both clinical indicators and laboratory parameters began to show marked improvement. The treatment protocol included the initiation of artesunate injections at a dosage of 2.4 mg/kg/dose. The first injection was administered upon admission, followed by subsequent doses at 12 hours and 24 hours post-admission. This was followed by once-daily injections for three additional days, after which the patient transitioned to an oral regimen of an artemisinin-based combination therapy.

Two weeks post-discharge, the patient reported no residual symptoms, and follow-up laboratory tests indicated that all parameters had returned to normal ranges, confirming full recovery. This case underscores the complexity and importance of thorough diagnostic investigation in patients presenting with febrile illnesses, particularly in regions where multiple vector-borne diseases coexist.

## 5 Discussion:

We present a case of patient presented with 8 days history of fever accompanied by chills, rigors, vomiting, muscle and joint pain. Laboratory investigations confirmed coinfection with Chikungunya and malaria, specifically *Plasmodium falciparum*. Such malaria and Chikungunya co-infections are increasingly reported globally [5].

The co-infection of Chikungunya and malaria presents significant diagnostic and therapeutic challenges, particularly in endemic regions like Sudan, where both diseases are prevalent [2 - 5]. Clinically, the symptoms of these infections often overlap, leading to potential misdiagnosis and delayed treatment [5, 16, 29]. For instance, the presentation of fever, chills, and musculoskeletal pain can be indicative of both malaria and Chikungunya, complicating the clinical picture. This overlap necessitates heightened awareness among healthcare providers to distinguish between these conditions effectively [10,29,30,55]. Particularly that, modeling and evidence from the field have revealed the risk of arboviral diseases overgrown the burden of malaria in the area [58].

In addition to malaria and Chikungunya, other febrile illnesses, such as dengue fever, leptospirosis, and viral hemorrhagic fevers and typhoid fever, must also be considered in differential diagnoses [5,10,29,30,55].

This broad spectrum of potential conditions emphasizes the need for comprehensive clinical evaluations and robust diagnostic capabilities. Accurate diagnosis is critical, as misattributing the symptoms to one disease could lead to inadequate treatment, worsening the patient’s condition and increasing mortality risks.

This case report highlights the importance of laboratory capacity in managing co-infections. Enhanced laboratory infrastructure with access to advanced diagnostic tools, such as RT-PCR, can significantly improve the accuracy and speed of diagnosis [2]. Investing in laboratory facilities and training personnel to conduct rapid and precise diagnostic tests is vital in mitigating morbidity and mortality associated with these infections. Such capacity building should focus on the identification of not only malaria and Chikungunya but also other endemic diseases that present similar clinical features.

For effective prevention and control of these mosquito-borne diseases, integrated vector management strategies are essential [39, 59, 61]. This approach should encompass environmental management to reduce mosquito breeding sites, public awareness campaigns about the symptoms and transmission vectors, and community engagement in control efforts [61,62]. Engaging the community through a One Health approach in improving the living environment, water sanitation and hygiene, and waste management is more sustainable and cost-effective strategy to prevent and control several risk factors and infections in limited resources settings [39,42, 57,63,64].

Additionally, collaboration between health authorities, research institutions, and non-governmental organizations is crucial in formulating evidence-based strategies to enhance surveillance and response capabilities to emerging health threats. Research efforts should also focus on vaccine development for Chikungunya and improved therapeutics for malaria to augment existing control measures.

In conclusion, addressing the dual burden of Chikungunya and malaria requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses improved clinical awareness, enhanced diagnostic capabilities, and robust preventive measures. By fostering collaboration and investing in public health infrastructure, we can better manage these infections and ultimately reduce their impact on health systems in endemic regions like Sudan.

### **Consent for Publication**

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient to publish this report in accordance with the journal’s patient consent policy.

### **Authors’ contributions**

EES, ATH, YA, CMM, NM and AA contributed in the Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft and Writing – review & editing of final version.

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#### Table legend:

Table 1. Demonstrated the laboratory investigations results done for the patient

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