Malaria is a disease that destroys red blood cells. Scientists investigated whether certain red blood cell phenotypes were associated with developing severe or mild malaria. They compared the red blood cell phenotypes of hospital patients suffering from severe malaria with the red blood cell phenotypes of patients suffering from mild malaria. The results are shown in the table.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Red blood cell phenotype** | **Ratio of patients withsevere malaria : patientswith mild malaria** |
| Sickle cell trait | 0.48 : 1 |
| Blood group A | 2.45 : 1 |
| Blood group O | 0.96 : 1 |

(a)     Explain the advantage of presenting the results as a ratio.

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**(2)**

(b)     What do these data show about the effect of red blood cell phenotypes on the chance of developing severe malaria rather than mild malaria?

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**(2)**

(c)     The allele for normal haemoglobin in red blood cells is **HbA**. In some parts of Africa where malaria occurs there is a high frequency in the population of the allele **HbC**.
Individuals possessing the **HbC** allele have a lower chance of developing severe malaria. Severe malaria causes a large number of deaths in Africa.

Explain the high frequency of the **HbC** allele in areas where malaria occurs.

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**(3)**

**(Total 7 marks)**

**Mark Scheme**

(a)     1.      Allows (valid) comparison;

2.      Number / sample size may vary;

**2**

(b)     1.      Increased chance of (severe malaria) with blood group A / decreased chance of (severe malaria) with sickle cell;

*Accept: converse for mild malaria i.e. increased chance of mild malaria with sickle cell / decreased chance of mild malaria with blood group A.*

*Accept: if answer is comparative e.g. greatest risk of severe malaria with blood group A.*

2.      One mark for one of the following:

almost equal chance with blood group O / slightly greater chance of mild malaria with O / slightly lower chance of severe malaria with O / 2.5 x / 2.48 x / more than twice the chance of severe with blood group A / (almost) 50% / half the chance of severe malaria with sickle cell / twice the chance of mild malaria with sickle cell;

*Neutral: answers which only refer to or use ratios.*

**2**

(c)     1.      Individuals with the **Hb**C (allele) reproduce;

2.      Pass on **Hb**C (allele) which increases in frequency;

3.      **HbA** **HbA** individuals less likely to survive / reproduce / frequency of **HbA** (allele) decreases;

**3**

**[7]**

**Examiner report**

(a)    The vast majority of students gained one mark for explaining that using ratios enabled a (valid) comparison to be made. However, only half of these students then explained that ratios would not be affected by different sample sizes. Incorrect responses referred to ratios being easier to work with, or that they would allow statistical tests to be performed.

(b)     Most students had no difficulty linking red blood phenotypes to the chance of developing severe malaria rather than mild malaria for one mark. However, only half of these students then gave a correct numerical comparison to gain a second mark.

(c)     The majority of students understood why the frequency of the HbC allele was higher in malarial areas but only the better responses explained it in a way that enabled them to gain all three marks. Most answers only referred to the HbC allele. Most students appreciated that individuals with the HbC allele were more likely to survive malaria and to reproduce. However, students did not always fully explain that the HbC allele would be passed on to future generations, thus increasing the frequency of this allele. Very few students appreciated that selection would operate against HbAHbA individuals.