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SMALLPOX SURVEILLANCE  
in  
PIILGRIMAGE AREAS

by

DR. I. SHAKIR \*

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\* WHO Epidemiologist, Smallpox Eradication  
Saudi Arabia 0030

I INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of Moslems from different parts of the World come to the holy cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to fulfill one of the most sacred and important duties of their religion, that is, HAJ TO MACCA and visit of MEDINA.

Over 300 000 people are received yearly by Saudi Arabia. Many of them are coming from countries which are smallpox infected areas. Table I shows the number of Pilgrims for the last two years 1967 and 1968, according to their countries of origin.

It is noted that the number of pilgrims has increased substantially. The big responsibility that the Government of Saudi Arabia is carrying out will be appreciated because this unique migration of all the people happens every year during a very short limit of time in a very overcrowding situation. In fact the peak of this occurs during a period of 3-4 days. The pilgrims come by three routes: air, sea and road. During the last few days, more are coming by air than before. This increased air travel is making surveillance more difficult as the period of transportation will be shorter and the task greater.

II HISTORY OF SMALLPOX IN SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia has been for some time a smallpox-free country. Tables 2 and 3 show that the last case detected was in 1962. The Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia intends to keep the country free from the disease and so, has been doing every possible thing to

achieve this objective. However, there is a high risk of introducing the disease into the country with the pilgrims who come from endemic areas. The Government of Saudi Arabia is fully aware of the risk and this is why it was decided to start a mass vaccination campaign in the country, in order to build up a high level of immunity among the population.

The first mass vaccination campaign was started in 1964-1965 and continued up till 1966-1967, but the coverage during this time was not complete.

Therefore, the Government, being desirous to completely eradicate smallpox, has started another mass vaccination campaign to ensure a maximum coverage of the population, this time with the technical assistance from WHO.

The new project is expected to be completed in 2-3 years covering the whole population estimated at about 6 to 7 millions.

### 3. HEALTH FACILITIES

The Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia is putting all its health facilities to serve the pilgrims in the crowded cities of HAJ, JEDDAH, MECCA and MEDINA. These Health Services offer full help to all pilgrims during this short period. Table 4, and attached figures, shows the number of hospitals, dispensaries and health centres in those areas.

In addition, there are mobile teams and emergency health centres which are kept fully-staffed, especially during the peak of the pilgrimage days, i.e. at that time, there are 11 more temporary Medical Centres established between ARAPAT and MUJNA, which are not 20 kilometers distant from each other, in order to attend to the emergencies happening during the pilgrimage time.

#### 4. SURVEILLANCE DURING PILGRIMAGE SEASON

Pilgrims begin to arrive by three routes, air, sea and road, as from 10 Zil Qada reaching its peak on the 30th and nearly stopping towards 5th Ze ElHija. These are the Arabic dates and they vary from year to year if compared to the European calendar. For instances, in 1970, the above mentioned dates will fall respectively on 15 January, 5 February and 10 February 1970.

About 100 planes arrive daily in Jeddah Airport, during this period and nearly 2 000 passengers by sea every day. All pilgrims arriving by air and sea should be in possession of an International Health Certificate.

The number of staff are increased at the ports of arrival as follows :

		<u>Usual No.</u>	<u>During pil- grimage</u>
<u>Airport</u> :	Doctors	1	3
	Sanitarians	8	24
<u>Seaport</u> :	Doctors	2	2
	Sanitarians	2	8

The work is divided between these staff members on three shifts for a period of 24 hours. Any suspected case of infectious disease is immediately detected.

In every city of the pilgrimage area, i.e. Jeddah, Mecca and Medina, there is a health Office, which is responsible for the reporting of infectious cases whether during the season or off-season. These Offices are each headed by a Doctor, and staffed by a sanitarian, and the usual number of clerks to carry out the various duties of the office.

Vaccination against smallpox is one of the important duties of these Offices, particularly during pilgrimage. They could serve as surveillance stations, if their staff members were increased with well-trained personnel and supplied with all the necessary equipment, with reporting forms, and, of course, with vehicles to be used for epidemiological investigations if necessity would arise.

In Jeddah, there is a large Quarantine Hospital with a capacity of 3000 beds. It is usually staffed permanently :

5	Male Doctors
2	Female Doctors
21	Male Nurses
16	Female Nurses
7	Sanitarians
5	Laboratory Assistants
2	X-Ray technicians
4	Assistant Pharmacists
88	Servants

It has 5 vehicles for the various purposes. This hospital is also made ready during the pilgrimage season to accept any number up to three thousands.

It is hoped that all countries appreciate what the Government of Saudi Arabia is offering of increasing sanitary and health facilities to achieve the purpose of keeping the pilgrims as comfortable and healthy as possible.

In this respect, the Saudi Arabian Government requests all Governments to observe the International Health Regulations, and to ensure that Certificates are issued by responsible Officers, and also to ensure that everyone who holds a certificate has been vaccinated.

I believe all countries should fully cooperate in this respect since this is a matter of great concern to all Governments which send Medical Missions every year during the HAJ season to look after the pilgrims and offer their services to them and they should see that all restrictions on the Health Certificates are enforced for the safety of all pilgrims as well.