

Current major event

Health advisories for travelers to Saudi Arabia, Hajj, 1439 H

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health has issued health requirements for travelers to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage to Mecca in connection with performing hajj in 2018 (1439 H). Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is one of the largest and most longstanding annual mass gathering event in the world.

Editorial note

Every year, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) publishes travel advisories as part of health requirements for entry into Saudi Arabia for Hajj and Umrah. These stipulated requirements and conditions do not imply an endorsement by WHO.

This year, the Hajj is expected to take place during the third week of August 2018, from the 8th to the 13th of Dhu'l-Hijjah (the 12th and last month of the Islamic calendar). The annual hajj draws about 2 to 4 million Muslim pilgrims every year; at least 1.5 to 2 million pilgrims are foreign visitors.

The inevitable overcrowding due to the presence of such large numbers of people in a relatively confined area poses a unique health risk. Large mass gatherings such as Hajj and Umrah bring together people from all around the world, thus increasing the risk of infectious diseases of epidemic potential, and may amplify many infections.

During the current year, some infectious diseases continue to pose an additional health risk to pilgrims. These diseases include Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), yellow fever, cholera, meningitis and dengue. In response to these threats, the Ministry of Health (MoH) Saudi Arabia, in addition to other recommendations emphasized on the constitution of the medical mission and their working modalities. It is being proposed this year that each country will ensure that the medical missions accompanying pilgrims have 1 physician/1 000 pilgrims and at-least 20% of these should be public health physicians. In view of managing highly hazardous medical waste each medical mission should also have a valid medical waste contract with

Health requirements and recommendations for hajj 1439 H

1. All pilgrims arriving from countries at risk of yellow fever (YF) transmission must present a valid YF vaccination certificate showing that the person was vaccinated at least 10 days before arrival to Saudi Arabia (YF vaccination certificate is valid for life);
2. All visitors (all ages) arriving from polio-endemic countries, currently or previously affected with wild polio virus 1 or circulating vaccine-derived polio virus, are required to submit a vaccination certificate stating that they have received oral polio vaccine (bOPV), or inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV), within the previous twelve months or at least four weeks before arrival;
3. Pilgrims (aged 2 and older) from all countries are required to produce a certificate of vaccination with at least 1 dose of quadrivalent (ACYW135) vaccine against meningococcal meningitis issued at least 10 days and not more than 3 years before arrival;
4. It is recommended that the medical missions accompanying pilgrims should have 1 physician/1 000 pilgrims and 20% of them should be public health physicians. In addition to that, medical mission should have valid medical waste management contract, medical clinic should have an isolation room and the mission should be committed to report notifiable infectious diseases to Saudi Arabian Health system using approved methods.
5. It is recommended that all pilgrims, particularly those at increased risk of severe influenza diseases including the elderly, pregnant women, and people with pre-existing health conditions such as asthma, chronic heart or lung diseases, HIV/AIDS infection, be vaccinated against seasonal influenza, before they arrive in Saudi Arabia with recent WHO approved strains specific to northern or southern hemispheres.

Other health advisories

- It is recommended that the food items carried by pilgrims should be in small quantities and properly canned or in sealed containers only. Extensive hygiene practices should be followed; Rigorous hand hygiene, thoroughly washing vegetables and fruits before consuming and as well as avoiding eating improperly cooked food.
- It is recommended that all pilgrims, for both hajj and Umrah, take insect bite avoidance measures during daytime and night time hours to reduce the risk of infection from any arboviral diseases, specifically dengue and Zika virus infection.
- In the event of a public health emergency of international concern or outbreaks, KSA health authorities will notify WHO as per the requirements of International Health Regulations (2005) and will undertake additional preventive precautions (not included in the measures mentioned above) after consultation with WHO to avoid the spread of infections.

a certified local company. The requirements also propose that the medical clinic for the visiting pilgrims (outside the Kingdom) should have at least one infectious diseases isolation room that meets the standards of the ministry of health of Saudi Arabia. The requirements make it mandatory for the medical missions to report notifiable infectious diseases to Saudi Arabian health authority immediately using an approved reporting system.

It is imperative that the countries sending pilgrims to hajj this year comply with these health requirements as preventing any international spread of diseases that is associated with hajj and Umrah remains a shared responsibility between KSA and other countries sending pilgrims.

Update on outbreaks in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS in Saudi Arabia; **cholera** in Somalia; **cholera** in Yemen; **Polio** in Pakistan.

Current public health events of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Avian influenza: 2006-2017

Egypt (A/H5N1)	[359 (122), 34%]
Egypt (A/H9N2)	[4 (0)]

Ebola virus disease (EVD): 2018

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	[45 (25), 55.5%]
------------------------------------	------------------

Lassa fever: 2018

Nigeria	[438 (117), 26.7%]
---------	--------------------

Cholera: 2017-2018

Somalia	[3 280 (21), 0.6%]
Yemen	[1 096 371 (2 282), 0.2%]
Tanzania	[1 812 (36), 2.0%]

Diphtheria: 2018

Yemen	[1 761 (93), 5.3%]
Bangladesh	[6 887 (42), 0.6%]

MERS: 2012-2018

Saudi Arabia	[1 833 (715), 39.0%]
--------------	----------------------

Yellow Fever: 2017-2018

Brazil	[1,261 (409)] 32.4%
--------	---------------------