

Current major event

Health advisories for travelers to Saudi Arabia, Hajj, 1434 H

The Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has issued health requirements and recommendations for entry visas for Hajj for the year 2013 (1434 H).

Editorial note

Every year, at the request of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, WHO is publishing the "*Health conditions for travelers to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)*" to inform visitors of the full requirements for entry into Saudi Arabia for the Hajj and Umrah. However, these stipulated requirements and conditions do not imply an endorsement by WHO.

Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is the largest and most long-standing annual mass gathering event on earth. This year, the annual Hajj is expected to take place approximately from 13 to 18 October. Hajj draws about 3 to 4 million Muslim pilgrims from over 160 countries around the world of whom at least 2 to 2.5 million pilgrims are foreign visitors.

The inevitable overcrowding of such large number of people in a relatively confined area poses a unique health risk. Because the mass gatherings such as Hajj and Umrah bring together large numbers of people from all around the world, it increases the risk and may amplify many infections, particularly the infectious diseases of potential concerns.

This year, the emergence of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) which has affected 5 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region so far (Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Tunisia) is of special concern for this year's Hajj. Although, the full clinical scope of this disease remains poorly understood as well as the nature of exposure that result in infection and so far, only limited but not sustained person-to-person transmission has been observed, the MERS-CoV still poses a threat as the virus that

Health requirements and recommendations for Hajj 1434 H

1. All pilgrims arriving from countries at risk of Yellow fever (YF) transmission need to present a valid YF vaccination certificate showing that the person was vaccinated at least 10 days before and not more than 10 years before arrival;
2. All visitors under 15 years of age coming from countries reporting polio should be vaccinated with the oral polio vaccine (OPV), at least 6 weeks before their travel date. People (all ages) arriving from polio-endemic countries are required to submit a vaccination certificate stating that they have received OPV six weeks before their arrival in the KSA. All visitors coming from these polio-endemic countries will be given another dose of OPV upon arrival in the Kingdom irrespective of their ages ;
3. Pilgrims (including children above 2 years) from all countries are required to produce a certificate of vaccination with the quadrivalent (ACYW135) vaccine against meningococcal meningitis issued not more than 3 years previously and not less than 10 days before arrival;
4. It is recommended that all pilgrims, particularly those with preexisting health conditions like the elderly, obese, pregnant women and people with chronic respiratory or heart diseases or cardiac, hepatic or renal failure, be vaccinated against seasonal influenza before they arrive in Saudi Arabia with WHO approved strains specific to northern or southern hemispheres;

Other health advisories

- Pilgrims are not allowed to bring with them any kind of food stuff from their countries, unless it is canned, sealed or in easily opened containers for checking ingredients;
- In the event of any health emergency or outbreaks, the health authorities in Saudi Arabia, subject to notification under the IHR (2005), may take any additional preventive precautions (not included in the measures mentioned above) following consultation with WHO to avoid the spread of infections among pilgrims .

causes MERS can spread from person to person through close contact, so pilgrims living and traveling in crowded conditions may be at risk.

The outbreaks of meningococcal meningitis caused by W135 strains in 2000 and 2001, that occurred amongst the Hajj pilgrims and their close contacts worldwide, with the associated high mortality showed the potential for international spread of infectious diseases associated with mass gatherings. The battle against spread of travel-related infections, therefore, remains a shared responsibility for protecting international health security. The health authorities of the countries sending pilgrims for Hajj should co-ordinate with government of KSA and implement appropriate public health preventive measures amongst the pilgrims before their departure to the KSA. A multi-pronged approach involving awareness programme for pilgrims, in line with health advisories should also be considered.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Novel Coronavirus in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar & Tunisia; **Hepatitis E** in South Sudan; **Wild poliovirus** in Somalia.

Current public health events of international concern

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

Avian influenza

Egypt	[173 (63), 36.4%]
Indonesia	[192 (160), 83.3 %]
Viet Nam	[125 (62), 49.6%]
Cambodia	[31 (27), 87.1%]
Global total	[629 (375), 59.6%]

Hepatitis E

South Sudan	[11,637 (209), 1.8%]
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Novel Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

Saudi Arabia	[84 (42), 50%]
Italy	[2 (0)]
Jordan	[3 (2), 66%]
France	[1 (0)]
UAE	[7 (3), 42.8%]
Qatar	[5 (2), 40%]
Tunisia	[3 (1), 33%]

Influenza A (H7N9) virus

China	[135 (44), 32.6%]
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Meningococcal meningitis

South Sudan	[196 (13), 6.6%]
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Wild poliovirus

Somalia	[163 (0)]
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CFR=Case-Fatality Rate; # Suspected cases