

## Current major event

### Hajj (1434 H) begins as the threat of MERS-CoV persists

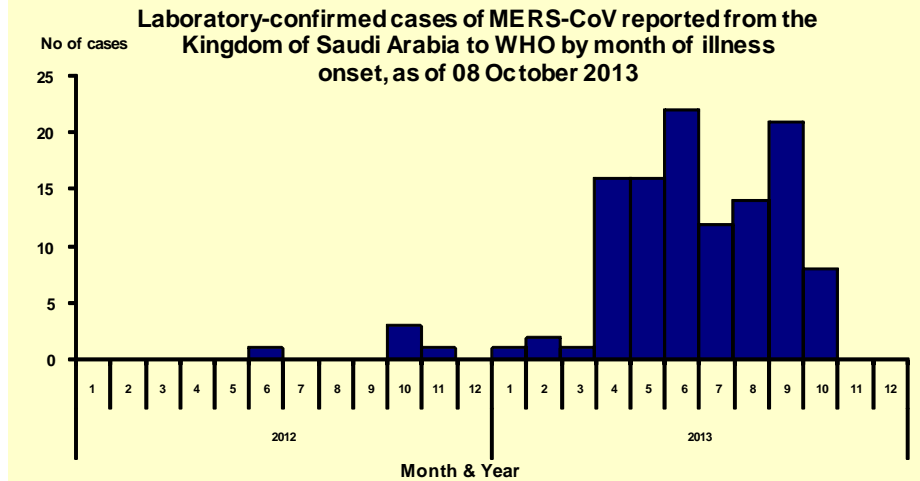
Between two and three million pilgrims are expected to assemble this week in the holy places of Mecca and Medina to perform the annual Hajj this year (1434 H). In view of the ongoing outbreak of MERS-CoV infections in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this year's Hajj represents a risk for international spread of infection associated with the returning pilgrims.

### Editorial note

This year's Hajj (1434 H) has raised unprecedented global attention in view of the public health concerns for international spread of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) as majority of the global cases of MERS-CoV (119 cases out of a global total of 138) are reported from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The annual Hajj in the KSA attracts close to 3 million people every year from approximately 180 countries. Like any other mass gatherings, Hajj has significant implications for health security because of the high potential for spread of infectious diseases owing to crowd density and population movement that may favour transmission of highly contagious diseases both during and after the Hajj.

The recent outbreak of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in the KSA has heightened the concern of a possible international spread of MERS-CoV infections to other countries that may be associated with the returning pilgrims. The concern prompted the national health authorities of the KSA to recommend that persons older than 65 years, children, pregnant women and those with underlying medical conditions should postpone the pilgrimage due to the risk of importation of MERS-CoV infections. This may result in lesser number (approximately 30%) of pilgrims visiting the Kingdom for Hajj this year compared to the previous years.



### Important public health measures for consideration after the Hajj

- General measures at the points of entry for assessing ill travelers;
- Risk communication to the returnee pilgrims for recognition of early signs and volunteer self-reporting;
- Awareness of health-care workers on early case recognition and maintaining proper infection control measures;
- Enhanced surveillance for the returnee pilgrims for early detection of cases

In view of the current risk of spread of MERS-CoV infections amongst the pilgrims, the Saudi national health authorities have strengthened the surveillance and health education for incoming pilgrims through its wide network of health centers, volunteers as well as through the medical teams accompanying the pilgrims from various countries. In addition to the existing laboratory facility in Jeddah and Medina, a new laboratory unit has been installed at Mena Alwadi Hospital in order to rapidly conduct tests for suspected cases.

Preventing any global spread of MERS-CoV after the Hajj remains a shared responsibility between the KSA hosting the Hajj as well as the countries sending the pilgrims. Enhanced surveillance system should be put in place and a very high level of vigilance should be maintained by all countries for the pilgrims returning from the Hajj and a rapid detection, testing and notification system should be introduced for any suspected case of MERS-CoV.

### Update on outbreaks

*in the Eastern Mediterranean Region*

**Novel Coronavirus** in KSA; **Hepatitis E**: in South Sudan; **Wild poliovirus** in Somalia and Sudan.

### 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	[11,897 (235), 1.9%]#
-------------	-----------------------

#### Novel Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

Saudi Arabia	[119 (51), 43% ]
UAE	[7 (3), 42.8% ]
Qatar	[5 (2), 40%]
Tunisia	[3 (1), 33% ]

#### Influenza A (H7N9) virus

China	[135 (44), 32.6%]
-------	-------------------

#### Crimen-Congo haemorrhagic fever

Pakistan	[77 (15), 19.4%]
----------	------------------

#### Wild poliovirus

South Sudan	[3 (0)]
Somalia	[171 (0)]

CFR=Case-Fatality Rate; # Suspected cases