

Current major event

Health advisories for travelers to Saudi Arabia, Hajj, 1435 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 2014 (1435 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 Region, Saudi Arabia, is the largest and most long-standing annual mass gathering event on earth. Hajj draws about 2 to 3 million Muslim pilgrims from over around the world.

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 continuous reporting of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) cases from the Middle East countries including KSA, Jordan, Iran and UAE, and the upsurge of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in 4 of the Western African Countries for the first time, is of extraordinary concern for this year's Hajj. The two diseases can be transmitted from person to person. The MERS-CoV can spread from person to person through close contact, so pilgrims living and traveling in crowded condition may be at risk. Furthermore, EVD is highly contagious and the case fatality rate may reach up to 90%.

Health requirements and recommendations for Hajj 1435 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 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;
- Those who are coming from any of the African meningitis belt countries will receive preventive medications at ports of entry.
- 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 .

In view of the risk of MERS-CoV, the Ministry of Health of KSA recommended that the elderly people, pregnant women, children and those with chronic diseases for example heart diseases, kidney diseases, respiratory diseases, diabetic and immune deficiency to postpone the performance of Hajj this year

The fight against spread of travel-related infections diseases, 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 services and preventive measures amongst the pilgrims before their departure, and report immediately for any suspected case. Awareness programs for pilgrims, before arriving to KSA and during their stay, in line with health advisories should be considered.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS-CoV in Saudi Arabia

Current public health events of international concern

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

Avian Influenza A (H5N1): 2006-2014

Egypt [176 (64), 36.4%]

MERS-CoV: 2012-2014

Saudi Arabia [721 (259), 35.9%]

Jordan [11 (6), 54.5%]

Oman [2 (2), 100%]

UAE [68 (8), 11.8%]

Kuwait [3 (1), 33.3%]

Tunisia [3 (1), 33.3%]

Qatar [7 (4), 57.1%]

Yemen [1 (1), 100%]

Egypt [1 (0), 0%]

Lebanon [1 (0), 0%]

Iran [5 (1), 20%]

Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever: 2014

Guinea [506 (373), 73.7%]

Liberia [599 (323), 53.9%]

Sierra Leone [730 (315), 43.2%]

Nigeria [13 (2), 15.4%]

Wild poliovirus: 2014

Pakistan [104 (0), 0%]

Afghanistan [8 (0), 0%]

Somalia [4 (0), 0%]

Dengue Fever: 2014

Sudan [1151 (9), 0.8%]

Cholera 2014

South Sudan [5484 (119), 2.2%]