

Current major event

Health advisories for travelers to Saudi Arabia, Hajj, 1437 H

The Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has issued health requirements and recommendations for travelers to Saudi Arabia in connection with performing hajj for the year 2016 (1437 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 annual pilgrimage to Mecca are the largest and most long-standing annual mass gathering event on earth. Every year, hajj draws between 2 to 4 million pilgrims across the world during a five-day period from the ninth through the thirteenth of Dhu Al-Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar.

The inevitable overcrowding of such large number of people in a relatively confined area poses a unique health risk. Because the event brings 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, in addition to the persistent threat of Middle East respiratory syndrome, yellow fever (YF) and Zika virus (ZIKV) infection pose additional health risk to the pilgrims. A number of countries in Africa are currently witnessing active transmission of YF. In addition, ZIKV continues to circulate in North American countries. If not large, sizeable number of pilgrims from these countries infested with YF or ZIKV are likely to travel to Saudi Arabia for hajj this year.

Considering these threats, appropriate preventive measures need to be taken by all the pilgrims to avoid and spread of these diseases during the hajj.

Health requirements and recommendations for Hajj 1437 H

1. All pilgrims arriving from countries or areas at risk of Yellow fever (YF) transmission (one year or above) are required to submit a valid YF vaccination certificate showing that the person was vaccinated at least 10 days before arrival (the certificate for YF vaccination valid for life);
2. All visitors (all ages) arriving from countries with evidence of uninterrupted indigenous transmission of polio or countries which had transmission of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus within the past 12 months or those countries which remain vulnerable to polio are required to submit a vaccination certificate stating that they have received OPV fat-least our weeks before their arrival in the KSA.;
3. Pilgrims (including children above 2 years) from all countries are required to submit a certificate of vaccination with tetravalent (ACYW135) vaccine (polysaccharide or conjugate) 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 are vaccinated against seasonal influenza with most recent-ly available vaccines prior to their travel to Saudi Arabia.

Other health advisories

- The travelers should take insect bite avoidance measures during daytime and night time hours to reduce the risk of infection from Zika virus infection.
- 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 International Health Regulations (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 as well as to avoid any international spread of diseases.

The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito has not been detected in the pilgrimage areas of Saudi Arabia for many years. However this mosquito is present in surrounding cities. Therefore, it is recommended that travellers for hajj take insect bite avoidance measures during daytime and night time hours to reduce the risk of infection in consistent with WHO advice.

MERS is an another health risk which also needs attention. Based on previous advisories, all pilgrims while visiting the Kingdom for hajj should avoid visiting any camel farm or avoid drinking unpasteurized camel milk. The pilgrims should also maintain hand hygiene and other respiratory etiquettes throughout specially when they are in crowded condition. Preventing international spread of disease remains a shared responsibility. Therefore, every country sending the pilgrims need to follow the health advisories issued by the KSA

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS-CoV in Saudi Arabia;; **Cholera** in Somalia.

Current public health events of international concern [cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Avian Influenza : 2006-2016

Egypt (A/H5N1)	[350 (117), 33.4%]
Egypt (A/H9N2)	[3 (0)]

MERS-CoV: 2012-2016

Saudi Arabia	[1414 (601), 42.5%]
Bahrain	[1 (1), 100%]

Cholera : 2016

Somalia	[8838 (433), , 4.9%
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Yellow fever: 2015-2016

Angola	[3137 (345), 10.9%
DRC	[1644 (71), 4.3%

Lassa fever : 2015-2016

Nigeria	[273(149), 54.5%]
Benin	[54(28),51.8%

Avian Influenza A (H7N9) : 2013-2016

China	[770 (306),39.7%]
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Avian Influenza A (H5N6) : 2016

China	[4 (0)]
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Wild poliovirus: 2014-2016

Pakistan	[371(0)]
Afghanistan	[54(0)]

Zika Virus Infection: 2007-2016

60 countries and territories have reported transmission so far