

Current major event

Health advisories for travelers to Saudi Arabia, Hajj, 1438 H

Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is one of the largest and most longstanding annual mass gathering event in the world. Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health has issued Health conditions for travelers to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) – health requirements and recommendations in connection with performing hajj in 2017 (1438 H).

Editorial note

Every year, at the request of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the World Health Organization (WHO) publishes travel advice based on Saudi Arabia's travel advisory that informs visitors of the requirements for entry into Saudi Arabia for Hajj and Umrah. However, these stipulated requirements and conditions do not imply an endorsement by WHO.

This year, the Hajj is expected to take place during the first week of September 2017, from the 9th to the 13th of Dhu'l-Hijjah (the 12th and last month of the Islamic calendar). 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 pandemic 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), which emerged 5 years ago in Arabian Peninsula, and remains a health threat to pilgrims. Although no domestic transmission of Zika virus has been reported in Saudi Arabia, dengue fever which is transmitted through the same vector (*Aedes* mosquitoes) is endemic in cities around hajj premises.

Health requirements and recommendations for Hajj 1438H

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 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

- All travelers coming from current/ previous polio-endemic countries and from states vulnerable to polio for different reasons (decided by KSA Ministry of Health) will be given another dose of oral polio vaccine (OPV) upon arrival, irrespective of age.
- 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 Zika virus infection.
- In the event of a public health emergency of international health concern or outbreaks, KSA health authorities will notify WHO as per the 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.

The current highly spreading outbreak of cholera in Yemen, as well as in some African countries, may represent a serious risk to all pilgrims during the Hajj days and even after returning to their countries. Some African countries are currently reporting active meningococcal disease and yellow fever transmissions. Given these health risks, appropriate preventive measures should be taken by all pilgrims to avoid any spread of infectious diseases during Hajj season. Health authorities for all countries sending pilgrims for Hajj should coordinate with, and follow the health advisories announced by the Saudi government.

Awareness programs should be considered for all pilgrims to maintain optimal health during their stay in the country.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS-CoV in Saudi Arabia; **Cholera** in Somalia; **Cholera** in Yemen; **Chikungunya** 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)	[3 (0)]

Chikungunya: 2016-2017

Pakistan	[6,618 (0)]
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MERS-CoV: 2012-2017

Saudi Arabia	[1,671 (656), 39.3%]
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Cholera: 2016-2017

Somalia	[53,015 (795), 1.5%]
Yemen	[275,987 (1,634), 0.6%]

Meningococcal disease: 2017

Nigeria	[14,513 (1,166), 8%]
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Avian Influenza A (H7N9): 2013-2017

China	[1,533 (592), 38.6%]
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Ebola Virus Disease: 2017

DRC	[8 (4), 50%]
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Wild poliovirus: 2014-2017

Pakistan	[382 (0)]
Afghanistan	[65 (0)]

Zika Virus Infection: 2015-2017

84 countries and territories have reported transmission so far.