

Hajj pilgrims can reduce their risk of illness and injury through simple precautions. Meningococcal (A/C/Y/W135) vaccination is required for Hajj pilgrims. Pilgrims should take precautions against MERS coronavirus infection.

Hajj Travel Advice

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The Hajj Pilgrimage

The Hajj is the annual religious pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia involving more than 2 million pilgrims from around the world. The Hajj takes place from the 8th through the 12th of Dhu al-Hijja, the last month of the Islamic year. As the Islamic calendar is lunar, the timing of Hajj varies with respect to the Gregorian calendar. Umrah is a similar pilgrimage that can be undertaken at any time of year.

UPDATE FOR 2018

Hajj 2018/1439 H. is expected to take place between 19 August and 24 August 2018. Please note that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Health provides [advice](#) for pilgrims travelling to perform Hajj and Umrah.

This includes the advice that pilgrims are encouraged to consider their physical ability and health conditions prior to applying for Hajj and Umrah. Those with severe medical conditions such as terminal cancers, advanced cardiac, respiratory, liver, or kidney diseases are exempt from these religious duties.

Pilgrims travelling to perform the Hajj or Umrah can reduce their risk of illness and injury through simple precautions taken before and during their pilgrimage.

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

[MERS-CoV](#) is a new virus that has caused respiratory illness in a number of people in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia. Many people infected with MERS-CoV have had severe illness and pneumonia, and about half of them have died. Although the virus is not easily spread between people, there has been evidence of spread from person to person through extended close contact. Pilgrims living and traveling in close quarters may be at risk.

Pilgrims can help protect themselves from respiratory illnesses by washing their hands often; not touching their mouth, nose, or eyes; and avoiding contact with sick people.

The Saudi Ministry of Health also recommends wearing masks in crowded places, avoiding direct contact with camels, avoiding undercooked camel meat and avoiding drinking raw camel milk.

Pilgrims should pay attention to their health when traveling in the Arabian Peninsula, and seek medical care if they develop a fever and cough or shortness of breath within 14 days after returning from their trip.

There is no vaccine currently available to protect against MERS-CoV.

The Australian Department of Health has produced a useful [MERS-CoV information card for travellers](#) to carry with them while visiting Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East.

GENERAL HEALTH ADVICE FOR HAJJ PILGRIMS

What are the health risks?

Overcrowding can increase the risk of infections such as meningococcal disease, influenza and pneumonia.

Diarrheal disease is also common during Hajj due to drinking water or food contaminated in the crowded and hot conditions.

Cardiovascular disease (such as heart disease and strokes) and heat-related illness are the major causes of death in travellers to the Hajj.

Road traffic accidents are also a major cause of injury and death as pilgrims may walk long distances near or through heavy traffic.

Before you travel

Make an appointment to see your GP or travel clinic four to six weeks prior to departure to discuss your fitness to travel, what vaccines you need and what health precautions you should take.

If you take regular medicines, make sure you take enough to cover the whole time you will be away and carry a doctor's letter to avoid confusion at customs.

Make sure you review the advice published each year on the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health website which includes advice on the health requirements for receiving entry to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj.

Vaccinations

All travellers should be up to date with their routine vaccinations including those against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (dTpa) and polio.

Following outbreaks of [meningococcal disease](#) in past years, there is a requirement for all Hajj pilgrims to show proof of meningococcal vaccination before Hajj visas can be issued. Hajj pilgrims must have had a quadrivalent (A/C/Y/W135) meningococcal vaccination within the previous 3 years (for polysaccharide vaccines) or previous 8 years (for conjugate vaccines) but at least 10 days before arriving in Saudi Arabia.

Travellers from countries or areas at risk of [yellow fever](#) must also carry a valid yellow fever vaccination certificate.

[Seasonal influenza vaccine](#) is also recommended for pilgrims. You should also discuss with your GP or travel clinic the need for additional vaccines such as those against pneumococcal pneumonia, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid.

Vaccinations should be completed at least 2 weeks prior to departure.

Tips for healthy travel

1. Hajj pilgrims should stay well hydrated, use an umbrella for shade, wear sunscreen, and stay away from direct sun exposure where possible. Some rituals may also be performed at night to avoid daytime heat.
2. Drink water and beverages that are sealed or known to have been purified, and eat food that is served piping hot or fruit that you have peeled yourself.
3. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use a disinfectant hand cleanser.
4. For shaving, be aware that unclean razors can transmit viruses such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. Travellers should be shaved using disposable blades at officially designated centres, or use their own disposable blades and avoid sharing personal hygiene tools.
5. Follow road safety rules to avoid injuries. Take extra care when crossing roads and always wear a seatbelt when travelling in motor vehicles.

6. Try to avoid the most densely crowded areas during Hajj and, when options exist, perform rituals at non-peak hours.

What if I get sick?

If you get sick while overseas or on your return, seek prompt medical attention. If you become unwell on your return to Australia be sure to advise your doctor of your recent travel to the Middle East.

Be aware of how to manage travellers' diarrhoea, including drinking plenty of fluids made up with oral rehydration salts (ORS) to avoid dehydration.

Be aware of the early symptoms of meningococcal disease which may include fever, headache, nausea and vomiting, weakness, neck stiffness and a rash. If you develop these symptoms you need to seek medical attention immediately.

For more information

Check the latest travel advice from the Australian Government:

- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smart Traveller website:
<http://smartraveller.gov.au/bulletins/Pages/hajj-2018.aspx>
- Department of Health MERS-CoV information for travellers:
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-mers-info-bulletin-1.htm>

Carefully review the travel health requirements and health information from the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Health Hajj site (available in different languages):

<https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Hajj/Pages/default.aspx>

Real-time information during Hajj may be obtained from the Hajj Health Companion mobile phone app from the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Health. The app can be downloaded from the following site:

<https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/hajj/pages/hajjhealthcompanion.aspx>