

# Public health considerations – the Hajj



## SAFETY INFORMATION 004/26

Issue date:	26 May 2026
Replaces:	Safety Notice 012/25 – Clinician Alert: Public health considerations for the Hajj
Content reviewed by:	Health Protection NSW
Distributed to:	Chief Executives; Directors of Clinical Governance; Director, Regulation and Compliance Unit, Emergency Departments
<b>KEY MESSAGE:</b>	Clinicians should be alert for infectious diseases including Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS), meningococcal disease, measles and other respiratory infections in travellers returning from the Hajj (June/July). If MERS is suspected, involve local infection prevention and control and notify the NSW Specialist Service for High Consequence Infectious Diseases on 1800 HCID 00 or 1800 424 300.
<b>ACTION REQUIRED BY:</b>	Clinicians
<b>REQUIRED ACTION:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distribute this Safety Information to all relevant clinicians and clinical departments where patients may present with respiratory symptoms.</li> <li>2. Ensure that clinicians and other relevant staff are aware of the recommendations in this Safety Information and take appropriate action.</li> </ol>
<b>DEADLINE:</b>	Not applicable
We recommend you also inform:	<p>Directors, Managers and Staff of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency Departments</li> <li>• Virtual Care Services</li> <li>• Respiratory Medicine</li> <li>• Infectious Diseases / Infection Prevention and Control</li> </ul> <p>All other relevant staff, committees and departments.</p>
Website:	<a href="https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sabs/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sabs/Pages/default.aspx</a> <a href="http://internal.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/index.html">http://internal.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/index.html</a>
Review date:	May 2027

# Public health considerations – the Hajj

## SI: 004/26

### What has been updated since SN:012/25?

This Safety Information replaces SN:012/25 – Clinician Alert: Public health considerations for the Hajj which has now been **rescinded** and includes up to date information and hyperlinks surrounding public health considerations for the Hajj.

### Situation

Many people travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrimage (25–30 May 2026). The Hajj is one of the world's largest annual religious events, with up to 4 million pilgrims from 182 countries, although there may be fewer this year due to the current conflict in the Middle East. Travellers will be returning to NSW over the following weeks (June 2026).

Clinicians should be alert for Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS) and other travel-related illnesses (including invasive meningococcal disease, measles, influenza, RSV and COVID-19) in unwell individuals returning from the Middle East.

### Background

MERS coronavirus (MERS-CoV), distinct from SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2, is transmitted to humans via infected dromedary camels in the Middle East through direct or indirect contact. Specific modes of transmission are not fully known. Secondary transmission between humans is mostly associated with healthcare settings but has also occurred among family and workplace close contacts.

MERS-CoV typically presents with fever, cough and shortness of breath, often developing into severe pneumonia. Mortality is high, with 37% of reported cases resulting in death.

Since it was discovered in 2012, over 2,600 cases of MERS-CoV have been reported. Most of these (84%) were in Saudi Arabia. No cases have been reported in 2026 (as of 30 March 2026).

In 2024 and 2025 there were reports of meningococcal disease among travellers for Hajj and Umrah (another pilgrimage that can occur at any time). Other infectious diseases of risk to pilgrims include measles, respiratory syncytial virus, influenza and COVID-19.

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing has updated their MERS resources, including information for health professionals and posters to display in patient areas:

[www.health.gov.au/mers](http://www.health.gov.au/mers).

Given the conflict in the Middle East, travellers should also check smartraveller for Saudi Arabia travel advice: [www.smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/middle-east/saudi-arabia](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/middle-east/saudi-arabia).

The Saudia Arabian government has also developed resources for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims: [Your Health A Guide for Pilgrims](#).

### Assessment

MERS-CoV remains a risk in the Middle East. May-June is a peak travel period from the Middle East, significantly increasing the risk of MERS-CoV and other travel-related illnesses (e.g. measles and meningococcal disease) in travellers from the region. Assess for MERS in returned travellers with compatible illness to improve detection and minimise risk of transmission.

# Public health considerations – the Hajj

**i SI: 004/26**

## Recommendations

Consider MERS-CoV if a patient has symptoms of acute respiratory illness and has either:

- Recently travelled from or resided in the Middle East.
- Been in contact with a symptomatic person from the Middle East.
- Been in a healthcare facility with recent MERS cases.
- Had contact with camels or raw camel products in the Middle East.
- Been in contact with a probable or confirmed MERS case within 14 days before symptom onset.

If you suspect MERS:

- Isolate patient in a single negative pressure room.
- Apply airborne and contact precautions.
- Ask patient to wear a mask.
- Contact the Specialist Service for High Consequence Infectious Diseases on 1800 HCID 00 or 1800 424 300.

For other suspected respiratory infections, notify and follow local infection prevention and control measures. Refer to NSW Health [MERS](#), [Measles](#) and [Meningococcal disease](#) resources for health professionals for further guidance.

Report suspected cases of urgent notifiable conditions, including MERS-CoV, measles and meningococcal disease, to your local [Public Health Unit](#) on 1300 066 055.

## Further information

- NSW Health - Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) - <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/MERS.aspx>
- NSW Health - MERS-CoV control guideline - <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/controlguideline/Pages/MERS-coronavirus.aspx>
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing – Our role in biosecurity - <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/communicable-diseases/biosecurity/our-role>
- Australian Centre for Disease Control – Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) - <https://www.cdc.gov.au/diseases/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-mers>
- Australian Centre for Disease Control - Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS) – CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units - <https://www.cdc.gov.au/resources/publications/cdna-national-guidelines-mers>
- World Health Organization – Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) - [https://www.who.int/health-topics/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-mers#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-mers#tab=tab_1)

# Public health considerations – the Hajj

## SI: 004/26

- NSW Biocontainment Centre - Home (sharepoint.com) - <https://nswhealth.sharepoint.com/sites/BIOCON-WSLHD>
- NSW Policy Directive Early Response to High Consequence Infectious Diseases - [https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/Pages/doc.aspx?dn=PD2024\\_005](https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/Pages/doc.aspx?dn=PD2024_005)
- CEC High Consequence Infectious Diseases – Infection Prevention and Control Principles - <https://cec.health.nsw.gov.au/keep-patients-safe/infection-prevention-and-control/high-consequence-infectious-diseases>
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Ministry of Hajj and Umrah: Your health A Guide for Pilgrims- <https://haj.gov.sa/en/Awareness-Center/Awareness-Guides/Your-Health-A-Guide-for-Pilgrims?fileLang=en#>
- Smartraveller – Saudi Arabia - <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/middle-east/saudi-arabia>