

Current major events

Health Conditions for travelers to Saudi Arabia, Hajj, 1430 H

The Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia has issued a set of requirements and recommendations for entry visas for the Hajj and Umra season for the year 1430 H (2009). Given the current pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus situation in the world, these health requirements and conditions carry a special significance this year.

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 Umra. However, these stipulated requirements and conditions do not imply an endorsement by WHO.

In the current global context of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus infection, the health requirements issued by the Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), for the Hajj and Umra seasons in 1430 H (2009) is being considered important for reducing transmission of pandemic influenza virus amongst the Hajj pilgrims as well as limiting hajj related exportation of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus by the returning pilgrims.

Although, the impact of the current pandemic influenza on Hajj pilgrims is unpredictable, public health preparedness for such a mass gathering event is truly indicated. During the last summer, the Ministry of Health of the KSA organized an international consultative meeting inviting experts from WHO, ECDC and the CDC, USA. The workshop recommended a number of public health measures with a view to reducing risk of transmission from pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus.

The current health requirements and recommendations issued by the Ministry of Health of KSA on pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infection is based on these recom-

Requirements and Recommendations for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009

1. Individuals with chronic underlying health conditions (such as cardiac, renal, respiratory or neurological diseases, diabetes mellitus) and acquired or congenital immunodeficiency, pregnant women and extremely overweight individuals are more likely to experience complicated forms of pandemic influenza H1N1. Therefore, persons with the above mentioned conditions are recommended to defer performing the Hajj this year (2009).
2. It is further recommended that individuals aged less than 12 years or more than 65 years defer from performing the Hajj this year (2009)
3. Where the seasonal influenza vaccine and the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza vaccines are available in countries, proof of both vaccination would be required. Where vaccines are not available, visas will be issued to pilgrims by the responsible health authority of each country;
4. Health authorities in pilgrims' countries of origin are responsible for educating and advising pilgrims about public health measures (personal hygiene measures, cough etiquette, use of antiseptic hand gel, etc) to prevent the spread of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus infection

Other health measures

- All travelers arriving from countries at risk of Yellow fever transmission need to present a valid YF vaccination certificate showing that the person was vaccinated at least 10 days and not more than 10 years before arrival;
- Travelers from around the world are required to produce a certificate of vaccination with the quadrivalent (ACYW135) vaccine against meningococcal meningitis issued not more than 3 years and not less than 10 days before arrival;
- All people under the age of 15 years traveling to Saudi Arabia from countries re-infected with poliomyelitis need to be vaccinated against poliomyelitis with the OPV and should show a proof of vaccination 6 weeks prior to application for visa

mendations. These recommendations call for the population groups considered to be at high risk for complication from influenza to refrain voluntarily from this year's Hajj.

Risk communication is another very important element in this year's health requirements for Hajj particularly in terms of reducing transmission from influenza virus. Cough etiquette, personal hygiene measures and hand-washing are some of the measures that can be realistically implemented during the Hajj and may have a profound impact on reducing transmission.

It would need committed actions, and strong vigilance from the global public health community to reduce the potential impact of pandemic influenza during the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage. Mitigating the transmission burden associated with pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infection remains everybody's responsibility.

Update on outbreaks in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in all the 22 countries in EMR.

Kala Azar in Southern Sudan

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

Avian influenza

Egypt	[87 (27), 31%]
Indonesia	[141 (115), 81.6%]
China	[38 (25), 65.8%]
Vietnam	[111(56), 50.5%]
Global total	442 (262), 59.2%

Kala Azar

S. Sudan	[403 (04), 1%]
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Chemical (Methanol poisoning)

Uganda	[132 (61), 46.2%]
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Pandemic (H1N1) 2009

AFRO	[14 868 (103), 0.7%]
AMRO	[190 765 (4512), 2.4%]
EMRO	[28 751 (188), 0.6%]
EURO	[78 000 (300), 0.3%]
SEARO	[44 661 (678); 1.5%]
WPRO	[149 711 (516) 0.3%]
GLOBAL Total	[506,774 (6297), 1.2%]

CFR=Case-Fatality Rate