

## Hajj: health advice for pilgrims travelling to the Hajj

Hajj pilgrims can reduce their risk of illness and injury through simple precautions.

Meningococcal (A/C/Y/W135) vaccination is required for Hajj pilgrims.

### 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 (for example, it will be 4-7 November in 2011, and 24-27 October in 2012). Travellers to the Hajj can reduce their risk of illness and injury through simple precautions taken before and during their pilgrimage.

### 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 becoming 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 (<http://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Pages/Default.aspx>) 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 but at least 10 days before arriving in Saudi Arabia.
- You should also discuss with your GP or travel clinic the need for additional vaccines such as those against influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid.
- Vaccinations should be completed at least 2 weeks prior to departure.

### Tips for healthy travel

- Hajj pilgrims should stay well hydrated, wear sunscreen, and seek shade when possible. Some rituals may also be performed at night to avoid daytime heat.
- 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.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol based hand cleanser.
- At the end of Hajj, Muslim men shave their heads. Be aware that unclean shaving blades can transmit blood-borne viruses, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. Pilgrims should not share shaving blades and if using a barber they should seek licensed barbers using disposable blades at officially designated centres.
- Follow road safety rules to avoid injuries. Take extra care when crossing roads and always wear a seatbelt when travelling in motor vehicles.
- 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.
- Be aware of how to manage travellers diarrhoea, including drinking plenty of fluids made up with oral rehydration salts (ORS) to avoid dehydration. ORS sachets are available from your local pharmacy
- 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://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/index.html>
- Information from the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Hajj: <http://www.haj.gov.sa>

<b>Further information – Public Health Units in NSW</b>					
For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre – look under <i>NSW Government</i> at the front of the White Pages.					
<b>Metropolitan Areas</b>			<b>Rural Areas</b>		
<b>Northern Sydney / Central Coast</b>	Hornsby	02 9477 9400	<b>Greater Southern</b>	Goulburn	02 4824 1837
	Gosford	02 4349 4845		Albury	02 6021 4799
<b>South Eastern Sydney / Illawarra</b>	Randwick	02 9382 8333	<b>Greater Western</b>	Broken Hill	08 8080 1499
	Wollongong	02 4221 6700		Dubbo	02 6841 5569
<b>Sydney South West</b>	Camperdown	02 9515 9420		Bathurst	02 6339 5601
<b>Sydney West</b>	Penrith	02 4734 2022	<b>Hunter / New England</b>	Newcastle	02 4924 6477
	Parramatta	02 9840 3603		Tamworth	02 6767 8000
<b>Justice Health Service</b>	Matraville	02 9311 2707	<b>North Coast</b>	Port Macquarie	02 6588 2750
				Lismore	02 6620 7500
<b>NSW Department of Health</b>	Nth Sydney	02 9391 9000			
<b>NSW Health website</b>	www.health.nsw.gov.au				