

Key aspects briefly summarized

- Preferably only healthy people should go on the Hajj or Umrah pilgrimages.
- Routine vaccinations should be up to date; vaccination against meningococcal disease is mandatory and vaccination against polio, influenza, and hepatitis B is recommended.
- Follow food, water, and hand hygiene rules and wear a mask in crowded places.

Pilgrimages are a very important aspect of many people's lives. However, as with all international mass gatherings, pilgrimages bear health risks and thus require preparation. The Hajj is physically exhausting, therefore a medical assessment is recommended for those suffering from chronic conditions. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia advises elderly and seriously ill people, pregnant women, and children to postpone or refrain from undertaking the Hajj and the Umrah.

Before departure

Check for updated health, vaccination and entry requirements and general recommendations on:

- Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia (www.moh.gov.sa),
- Ministry of Hajj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (www.hajjinformation.com), and
- The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (www.saudiembassy.net/hajj-and-umrah-health-requirements).
- Travel information for entry requirements due to COVID-19: www.saudiembassy.net/traveling-kingdom-after-covid-19-pandemic.

Check for sufficient international insurance coverage.

Vaccinations

- All pilgrims should have routine vaccinations up to date; in addition, hepatitis A vaccination is recommended.
- **Meningococcal meningitis:** All adults and children >2 y must have received the conjugate quadrivalent (ACWY) meningococcal vaccination within the last 5 years and not less than 10 days prior to arrival. Proof of vaccination on a valid international certificate of vaccination is mandatory for visas for the Hajj or the Umrah.
- **Poliomyelitis:** Although the polio vaccine is not required for adult pilgrims from Europe, it is best to ensure full vaccination before travel as well as a booster if the last vaccination was more than 10 years ago. For those transiting through a country where polio is reported, proof of vaccination within the last 12 months and at least 4 weeks prior to departure is required. In this case, an oral polio vaccine (OPV) may be administered upon entry to Saudi Arabia.
- **Hepatitis B:** On completion of the Hajj, Muslim men shave their heads. It is thus recommended to take disposable razor blades. Use only officially licensed barbers whose establishments are clearly indicated as such, in order to avoid infection with blood-borne pathogens such as hepatitis B. Vaccination against hepatitis B is recommended.
- **Influenza:** As crowding increases the risk for infection, vaccination is especially recommended for small children, pregnant women, elderly, and individuals with chronic health conditions.

Menstruation

As Muslim law prohibits menstruating women from performing tawaf, women might consider consulting their gynaecologist before the pilgrimage if they intend to postpone or avoid menstruation.

During the Hajj

- **Heat:** During the summer months, daytime temperatures can reach 50°C and cause heat-related illness. Avoid excessive sun exposure by using umbrellas and seeking shade, wear sunscreen and stay well hydrated.
- **Hygiene:** Ensure optimal food, water, and hand hygiene (wash hands with soap and disinfect, avoid raw and undercooked food, unpasteurised milk, or tap water). Practise respiratory hygiene (wear a mask, keep a distance from other pilgrims if possible) to reduce the risk of respiratory infections such as tuberculosis, COVID-19, MERS (Middle-East respiratory syndrome), and influenza.
- **Diarrhea:** Ensure prompt and adequate rehydration. Carry oral rehydration solution (ORS). In case of severe diarrhea or vomiting with inability to hydrate, seek medical care.
- **Rabies:** If bitten by an animal, wash the wound with soap, disinfect, and seek immediate medical care for post-exposure rabies prophylaxis.
- **Mosquitos:** Take measures to prevent mosquito bites, particularly during the day in order to prevent infections such as dengue.
- **MERS-CoV** is a viral infection that is present on the Arabic Peninsula. It can cause severe lung infection. The way it is transmitted is unclear, but it can occur between humans and likely with close contact to camels or camel products (e.g. milk). The following people are currently advised not to go on pilgrimage due to higher risk of MERS-CoV infection: persons >65 years, persons with chronic diseases (e.g. diabetes, immunodeficiency, cancer, heart, kidney or lung diseases), pregnant women, and children.
- **Medical Care:** Many medical facilities provide free healthcare for pilgrims. Alternatively, there are fee-charging private hospitals.

After the Hajj

Seek medical care if suffering from fever, respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms, or any other health complaints following the pilgrimage.