

ADVICE FOR HUIJAAJ

Salamun Alaykum. My name is Dr. Mazaher Hassan Jaffer and I have been honored to serve you all, the guests of Allah SWT, as your group doctor.

The first timers, get ready for a good walk, and a trip of your life. The organizers and ulamaa will explain the other logistics but allow me to give you all a few tips on how to stay as healthy as possible.

We are expecting hot weather and we will be exposed to lots of dust and sun. In this case it is very important to make sure you are well hydrated at all times. It is also important to avoid any poorly ventilated areas as air-borne infections such as pneumonia and the likes are easily contracted in such circumstances. It is always tempting to eat out but remember your main objective is not to enjoy, and if you eat from a source that is doubtful you could contract a stomach or intestinal infection. Be sure that your vaccinations are in order especially hepatitis A, hepatitis B and Meningitis. It is also important to get a tetanus injection if the last one you've had is more than 2 years ago. Avoid construction sites and areas with looming objects. If any female has missed a period please ensure you know your pregnancy status before coming. All females using pills must recognize that their pills effectiveness will change in cases where there are bouts of diarrhea or when they are on antibiotics. Please do not take any prophylactic antimalarial or antibiotics. These normally complicate matters there. For those who are on chronic medication please do not forget to take enough stock of the same as it may not be available there.

In conclusion, If any one of you wants to ask me anything with regard to their health before your trip please send me an email on dr.mhjaffer@gmail.com. Please ensure you complete your medical record form that is also provided for our information. I have also attached some advice from the Saudi government in what it recommends for Hujjaj this year for your perusal:

FROM THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT:

Vaccination:

Meningococcal Meningitis:

Adults and children over the age of 2 years arriving for the purpose of Umrah or Hajj pilgrimage (or for seasonal work in the Hajj area) are required to produce a certificate of vaccination with quadrivalent vaccine against meningitis which has been issued not more than 3 years and no less than 10 days prior to arrival in Saudi Arabia. Certificates are not normally required from other categories of visitors or expatriate workers.

Requirement from Countries other than UK:

The Saudi Arabia Ministry of Health has other vaccination requirements for Hajj pilgrims entering from countries other than the UK:

- Yellow Fever - All travelers arriving from countries known to be infected with Yellow Fever (as per WHO) must present a valid yellow fever vaccination certificate.
- Poliomyelitis - All travelers arriving from countries that have polio virus circulating or from countries at high risk of re-importation of polio virus regardless of age and vaccination status, should receive one dose of oral polio vaccine.

Recommended Vaccines for Hajj & Umrah:

1. Seasonal Influenza:

The Saudi Ministry of Health recommends seasonal influenza vaccine for Hajj attendees before arrival, especially for those at increased risk e.g. the elderly, those with chronic chest or heart disease, diabetes or immunosuppressant.

2. Measles and Rubella:

Updating immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases in all travelers is strongly recommended. With the recent resurgence of measles and rubella cases, special attention is needed for both of these diseases to avoid widespread outbreaks during this year's Hajj and Umrah. Check that travelers are immune, either by previous immunization (2 doses or MMR) or natural measles infection.

Other Health Risks:

- **Malaria**

Malaria risk is present throughout the year but mainly from September to January. The risk is found in the south western region except high altitude areas of Asir Province and the cities of Mecca, Medina, Jeddah and Taif.

Hajj pilgrims, many travel between Mecca and Medina. The risk of malaria is low in both cities and anti-malarial prophylaxis is not advised while in either city. However, the journey between them passes through an area of high risk for malaria.

The journey takes 6 hours by road. If it is undertaken during the daytime, in an air conditioned vehicle from which mosquitoes can be excluded, the risk of malaria is very low and it is reasonable to practice bite avoidance only.

Note: Bite avoidance measures are important for the prevention of other mosquito-borne infections present in Saudi Arabia e.g. *Dengue Fever*

- **Travelers' Diarrhea :**

Diarrheal disease is common during Hajj and all travelers are at risk, but the risk is greatest for those consuming food which has been contaminated during preparation or storage, unpasteurized dairy products, raw unpeeled fruit and vegetables or contaminated water. In practice, those travelling on low budgets are at greatest risk. Diarrheal disease may be

more severe in young children, the elderly and those with underlying health problem who may become rapidly and dangerously dehydrated.

- **Climate Related Health Risks :**

Even during the winter months temperatures during the day in Saudi Arabia can reach 30°C. This can put pilgrims at risk of sunburn, sunstroke, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and dehydration. Hajj pilgrims may spend a lot of time walking and good quality footwear should be worn as the sand in the desert can get very hot and burn the feet; this is particularly important for those with diabetes. To ensure that shoes do not get lost when removed for prayer they should be kept in a small bag.

Ideally pilgrims should arrive in time to allow acclimatization to the hot conditions before undertaking Hajj. Pilgrims should be advised to rest, maintain good hydration with safe liquids, seek shade where possible and use a sunscreen factor 15 or higher.

In recent years the Saudi Ministry has endeavored to provide shade in densely populated areas. Pilgrims can also create shade by using an umbrella. Some rituals can be performed in the evening to avoid high daytime temperatures; Saudi authorities have decreed that pilgrims can perform the Stoning of the Devil anytime between sunrise and sunset.

Note: In the winter months the temperature during the night can fall to a very low level and pilgrims should be prepared for this by having sufficient warm bedding and clothing with them.

- **Blood-borne Virus Transmission Associated with Shaving:**

At the end of Hajj, Muslim men shave their heads, and non-sterile blades can transmit blood-borne infections, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. Licensed barbers are tested for these blood-borne pathogens and are required to use disposable, single-use blades. Unlicensed barbers continue to operate by the roadside, where they may use non-sterile blades on multiple men.

Male travelers should be advised to be shaved only at officially designated centers, which are clearly marked or carry their own razor for personal use.

- **Accidents and Injuries:**

As pilgrims may walk long distances through or close to dense traffic and busy roads, road traffic vehicle accidents are a potential hazard. Minor injuries to the feet are commonly associated with walking during Hajj and pilgrims with diabetes or poor circulation to the lower limbs must take particular care and wear appropriate footwear.

All injuries to the feet of those with other health issues such as diabetes should be assessed carefully by a healthcare professional.

It is strongly recommended that all pilgrims obtain comprehensive travel and medical insurance (including repatriation) before travel

Professionally yours,

Dr. Mazaher Hassan Jaffer