

Hajj pilgrims urged to be aware of MERS-CoV advice

The risk of infection to UK residents travelling to the Middle East remains very low and PHE, NaTHNaC and the World Health Organization do not currently advise any travel restrictions to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in relation to MERS-CoV.

We urge pilgrims returning from Hajj and Umrah to look out for these symptoms:

- fever
- coughing
- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

If individuals experience these symptoms within 14 days of leaving the Middle East, they should call their GP immediately or NHS 111 and mention their travel history.

However, Saudi Arabia has reported over 150 cases across the country since January 2019, occurring mainly among KSA residents. There is growing evidence that camels can be a source of infection. MERS-CoV can also spread person-to-person if there is close contact. It is important to practise good personal, hand and respiratory hygiene including covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing, using tissue or the upper sleeve, and washing your hands with soap and water regularly.

Dr Gavin Dabrera, lead for MERS-CoV at PHE said:

We strongly advise travellers to avoid contact with camels and consumption of camel products in the Middle East and to practise good hand hygiene.

Pilgrims returning from Hajj and Umrah with symptoms including fever and cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days of leaving the Middle East, should call their GP immediately or NHS 111 and mention their travel history.

Dr Dipti Patel, director of NaTHNaC, said:

Our [information sheet for pilgrims](#) includes information on health regulations, vaccine requirements and recommendations, and other general health advice for those planning to travel for Hajj and Umrah. Pilgrims are strongly advised to follow our specific guidance about staying safe and healthy when travelling.

1. The annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), known as the Hajj, is due to take place between 19 to 24 August this year, with many pilgrims travelling from the UK
2. Umrah is a shorter, non-compulsory pilgrimage for Muslims that can be performed at any time. Hajj is the annual pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) in the KSA.
3. There have been 5 cases of MERS CoV in the UK since 2012.
4. General travel health advice for travellers going to Saudi Arabia is available from NaTHNaC's website [TravelHealthPro](#).
5. The requirements and recommendations for the 2019 Hajj season are now available on the [KSA Ministry of Health website](#). We advise you to keep abreast of updates.
6. Health advice posters can be found here: