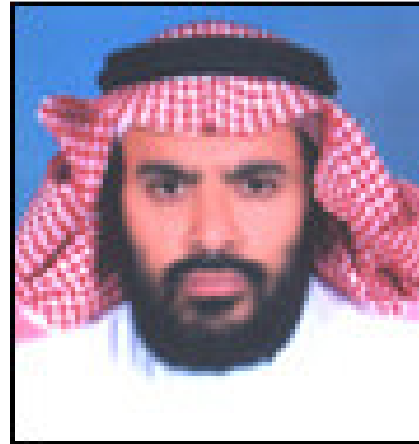


Most Common Diseases During Hajj Season

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Millions of Muslims of all age groups with various social, economical and health conditions visit the holy shrines every year to perform Hajj, which is considered the fifth pillar of Islam. It is indeed a unique occasion to see such a tremendous number of pilgrims from all over the world gathering in a very limited space, with an area not exceeding 3 square kilometers. Such a large human gathering in a heavily crowded area makes them susceptible to communicable infectious diseases. However, the Government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques is fully devoted and exerts the utmost efforts to prevent such epidemiological diseases by utilizing highly qualified professional staff, most recent scientific and medical methods and state of the art technology. In compliance with the directives of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the government has established three field hospitals in Mina, three field hospitals in Arafat., five permanent hospitals in Mecca, in addition to the numerous Primary Health Care Centres widely spread in the holy shrines of Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifa. These hospitals and primary care centers are fully equipped with highly specialized medical staff, advanced diagnostic and therapeutic modalities, and they provide free medical care to all pilgrims.



There are several factors affecting Hajj related common diseases. The most important factor is the ambient temperature. In this regard, the official Hajj statistics and medical research conducted during the hajj seasons 1402-1410 H show that sunstrokes and thermal strains are the major causes of morbidity and mortality among pilgrims. Therefore, the Ministry of Health has promptly established specialized units for providing immediate and effective medical care for such patients. It is noteworthy that the number of these cases has significantly decreased in the subsequent Hajj seasons when the weather became moderate. In fact, the latest years did not record any sunstroke incident except few thermal strain cases that were treated appropriately; the patients recovered and were able to leave the hospitals within few hours.

In view of the relatively cold weather during the last two Hajj seasons, the viral diseases such as flu and common cold symptoms were prevailing. Pulmonary

diseases were also detected among some pilgrims who are heavy smokers. Smoking causes bronchodilatation which leads to severe pulmonary diseases that may require ICU admission in some cases. A field study conducted on patients who were admitted to the holy shrines hospitals in 1422 Hajj season revealed that respiratory disorders were most common among smokers. They received appropriate medical care and the mortality rate was extremely low.

It is worth noting that the mean age of pilgrims arriving from outside the Kingdom is 60 years. Patients in this age group usually suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and artery sclerosis. Consequently, they may need hospital admission to receive primary and specialized health care.

The epidemiological diseases such as spinal meningitis have significantly decreased to the extent that they have become very rare recently. This could be achieved by virtue of the wise policy adopted by the Ministry of Health indicating that each pilgrim should submit a valid meningitis vaccination certificate. The ministry also coordinates with all concerned authorities to ban entry of pilgrims coming from countries inflicted with contagious epidemiological diseases. Furthermore, the Ministry works closely with the Holy City Municipality to ensure that safe and healthy food is served in all Hajj camps and to implement all precautionary measures required to protect pilgrims from food poisoning incidents.

The most important advice which should be given to pilgrims is preventive measures. It should be highly recommended to each person intending to perform Hajj that they receive the meningitis vaccine. In addition, we advise pilgrims who are forty years and above to receive pulmonary and flu vaccines. This is particularly important for pilgrims suffering from lung diseases such as smokers, bronchial asthma and pulmonary fibrosis patients.

The pilgrim is also advised to seek a suitable Hajj campaign that offers good services and to avoid congestion and exposure to thermal strain. All pilgrims should keep in mind that our Prophet, God's blessing and Peace Be Upon Him, is our ideal example. He always chooses the easiest and most practical option in performing Islam rituals and directs us to do the same in all our affairs. However, the pilgrim should be keen to clarify all matters pertaining to Hajj rituals and refer all his questions and queries to Islamic scholars in order to ensure that he performed Hajj rituals in a comprehensive and appropriate manner.

The patient who is willing to perform Hajj is recommended to seek medical advice first and consult his physician to ensure he is capable to perform the Hajj rituals. This will help him to avoid any complications and guide him to take the suitable precautionary measures. Patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases, asthma and bronchodilation are reminded to take an adequate quantity of their prescribed medications and to use these medicines in a timely manner without any negligence or delay in order to ensure an easy and smooth process in performing Hajj rituals.

In conclusion, I wish for all pilgrims a smooth, safe and blessed Hajj.

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