

## **IMPORTANT TIPS for PILGRIMS**

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Hajj season is quickly approaching, and you may be wondering what you should do to get ready. We all know about the requirement for the meningococcal vaccine, otherwise known as the Hajj vaccine, but is there anything else? There certainly are some important measures you can take to protect yourself and your family not just from meningitis, but also from influenza, tuberculosis and food borne illnesses.

The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health requires all pilgrims to have a certificate of vaccine against meningitis issued at least 10 days before, and not more than 3 years prior. Adults and children over the age of 2 years must receive the vaccination against meningococcal meningitis with the quadrivalent vaccine covering serogroups A, C, Y and W135. Children between 3 months and 2 years of age must be given 2 doses of the meningococcal A vaccine with a 3 month interval between the 2 doses.

For travelers arriving from other countries, there are vaccine regulations according to the country they are arriving from, and these may include Yellow fever and Polio.

However, to protect your self and your loved ones, there are a few other important measures you can and should take. People crowded together are vulnerable to outbreaks of respiratory illnesses, such as influenza. For this reason, it is highly recommended you take the influenza A vaccine before going to perform Hajj. The influenza A vaccine for 2007-2008 is readily available now in all major hospitals and clinics, and in general is protective for one year. There are other respiratory diseases caused by other germs, both viruses and bacteria. And these can be spread in respiratory droplets by coughing or sneezing, so do your best to avoid any one coughing or sneezing in your face. Tuberculosis, the common cold, influenza and pneumonia are all transmitted by droplets.



Germs can also be transmitted from person to another by touching something with respiratory germs on it, and then touching the mouth or nose. So, to protect yourself, wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol gel before eating or placing your hands near your mouth or nose. I cannot emphasize the necessity of hand hygiene- wash your hands thoroughly and frequently especially after using the

restroom, before preparing food, before preparing food, before eating or touching your mouth or nose. This is vital to prevent disease transmission.

Ensure your food and drinking water are safe. Viruses, bacteria and parasites can all contaminate food and water. Drink only bottled water. Infections may cause diarrhea, vomiting and even fever. Try to consume cooked food piping hot, and wash your own fresh fruits or vegetables- if this is not possible, then choose ones that can be peeled such as oranges or bananas. Avoid sharing personal items such as eating/drinking utensils, toothbrushes and towels.

Maintain a clean environment. Talk to your doctor about taking along loperamide (immodium), and possibly an antibiotic in case you need to self treat a moderate to severe diarrhea.

If you take prescription medications, make sure you have enough to last. Bring along insect repellent containing DEET to avoid insect (such as mosquito) bites. These can spread malaria and dengue fever. Wear sunblock to avoid sunburn. Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration, eat healthy, and ensure you get adequate sleep to perform the duties of Hajj.

I wish you a blessed, accepted pilgrimage and Kul Aam Wa Antum Bikair

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