



ALERT FOR CLINICIANS

Infectious disease risk and the Hajj pilgrimage

KEY POINTS

- The Hajj pilgrimage is taking place in Saudi Arabia from 04 to 09 June 2025. Approximately 2,000 Australians are expected to travel to Saudi Arabia to participate.
- There is a small risk of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) in returning Hajj pilgrims.
- Clinicians should remain vigilant for signs of MERS-CoV and IMD in returned travellers and take an exposure and travel history.
- For patients with an influenza-like illness reporting travel to Saudi Arabia within the past 14 days: isolate the person immediately and use appropriate infection prevention and control precautions.
- Notify suspected cases **urgently** to your local [Public Health Unit](#) (or the on-call Public Health Physician on 1800 434 122 if after hours).

Background

- MERS-CoV is a zoonotic coronavirus which can be transmitted to humans via exposure to infected camels and raw camel products in the Middle East. Person-to-person transmission can occur, particularly in health care settings and within households.
- Clinical presentation ranges from asymptomatic infection to acute upper respiratory illness, pneumonia or pneumonitis. It can be severe, with a fatality rate of around 39%.
- Those at higher risk of severe disease include the elderly and those who are immunocompromised or have comorbidities.
- Nine cases of MERS-CoV and two associated deaths were reported in Saudi Arabia between 01 March 2025 and 21 April 2025. No cases of MERS-CoV have ever been reported in Australia, however, other countries have experienced large nosocomial outbreaks from one imported case.
- Between 11 February 2025 and 18 March 2025, six cases of IMD (serogroup W) were reported among individuals or travellers who had recently returned from the Umrah pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. All Hajj pilgrims are required to be vaccinated against meningococcal ACWY.
- Although the risk is small, clinicians should be alert to the risk of MERS-CoV and IMD in returning pilgrims and ensure a travel history is taken from all patients with an infectious illness.

Patients returning from Saudi Arabia with an influenza-like illness

- Immediately **isolate** the person in a single room with ensuite facilities, preferably in a negative pressure isolation room.
- Implement standard, contact, droplet and **airborne transmission-based precautions**. This includes the use of a **gown, gloves, protective eyewear** and **particulate filter respirator**.
- **Ask about exposure** to camels, camel products (e.g. milk, urine or meat), hospitals, or people with acute respiratory illness.
- **Notify suspect cases URGENTLY** to your local [Public Health Unit](#) or, if after hours, the on-call Public Health Physician on 1800 434 122. Clinical advice may be sought from an Infectious Disease Physician/Clinical Microbiologist.
- Further information (and translated resources) about MERS-CoV, including [posters](#), factsheets for [health professionals](#) and [general practice](#), and an [information card](#) for travellers, are available at www.health.gov.au/MERS.

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