

# Travelling to the Hajj

## Background

Every devout Muslim seeks to perform the Hajj on at least one occasion during their life. This pilgrimage, which is a central duty of Islam, brings Muslims from all over the world together as they visit the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. Each year over two million gather to celebrate the five 'pillars' of Islam.

## Coping with the Climate

The dates for this festival vary from year to year but this year it is in December. In the evenings it can be significantly cold in 'tent city' and so travellers should bear this in mind when packing.

## Travel Restrictions

With this massive influx of people, travel in and out of Saudi can be difficult and, where at all possible, plans should be made well in advance to avoid disappointment.

## Care for the pilgrims

The Saudi government seek to provide the highest level of health care possible for those visiting their Kingdom. This has involved the setting up of a series of rules and regulations which need to be observed. **Nevertheless every pilgrim should ensure that their own personal health is sufficient before agreeing to travel.** This may involve a consultation with their GP - especially if they have any underlying medical conditions.

## Food Restrictions

No food is allowed into Saudi during this time and will be confiscated on arrival.

## Vaccine Requirements

In order to reduce the risk of certain diseases the Saudi authorities insist on all travellers providing correctly certified evidence of vaccination against some diseases.

## Meningitis

All travellers are required to provide evidence of vaccination against **Meningococcal Meningitis (ACYW-135)**. This vaccine has to have been given to every traveller within the previous three years and at least 10 days before arrival into Saudi Arabia. **(Other vaccinations against Meningitis C or Meningococcal A&C are not acceptable.)**

## Compulsory Medications

Some travellers arriving from what are regarded as 'higher risk' countries will also be given prophylactic antibiotics to lessen the possibility of their carrying Meningococcal Meningitis into the country. This is a compulsory requirement - though the medication given varies depending on the age of the individual and whether or not the female traveller is pregnant.

## Yellow Fever

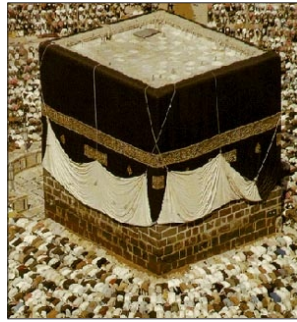
It is also essential for some travellers to have evidence of **Yellow Fever vaccination certification**. Generally this is only required for those arriving from the countries of Africa and South America. This vaccine needs to have been given within the previous 10 years and at least 10 days before arrival.

## Other Recommended Vaccines

Even though it is not a requirement of entry to perform the Hajj or visit Saudi Arabia, travellers are strongly advised to consider the following vaccinations;

## Influenza / Pneumococci

*These are air-borne diseases and the close proximity of so many pilgrims will make the risk of contracting either or both of these highly infectious diseases much higher. Influenza vaccine needs to be given each year where as Pneumococcal vaccine is often only given on one occasion in a lifetime.*



## Pandemic Influenza

This year it is even more important to ensure that all Hajj pilgrims are vaccinated against both the Seasonal Influenza as well as the Pandemic Influenza.

## Poliomyelitis

*This viral disease is disappearing from much of the world and may be eradicated within a few years. However during 2005 a significant number of outbreaks occurred in various African countries and India. The Hajj was linked to outbreaks in Yemen and Saudi Arabia itself. **Vaccination is recommended for all unprotected travellers.***

## Hepatitis A / Typhoid

*With such a massive number of people to be catered for it is hardly surprising that the level of food and water borne disease is high. **These vaccines are strongly recommended for all travellers.** They provide excellent protection but all travellers will still need to exercise extra care to lessen their personal exposure.*

## Hepatitis B

*The main specific risk of contracting Hepatitis B probably relates to the ritual head shaving which is performed as part of the celebrations. Professional barbers are used and long lines of men wait for their turn. In some cases (with unregistered barbers) the blade may not be changed between shaves and this potentially presents a serious risk of contamination with Hepatitis B infection.*

## Ritual sacrifice

It should also be noted that during the celebrations a ritual sacrifice of a small animal is performed. Pilgrims are strongly advised not to undertake the actual act of sacrifice themselves - unless they are very experienced - as otherwise they could seriously injure themselves or others close by.

## Avoiding Accidents and Dehydration

The desire to perform the Hajj is strong and it is an emotional time for any Muslim. Unfortunately the presence of so many other pilgrims in a very confined space at the same time does increase the risk of various diseases and accidents. This includes the risk of being crushed, as has occurred with disastrous consequences in the past. The degree of **dehydration** can also be high as there is a significant amount of exercise and walking involved. A good pair of **comfortable walking shoes** is certainly worth the investment. It will also be important to bring some **plasters** to treat minor injuries and blisters.

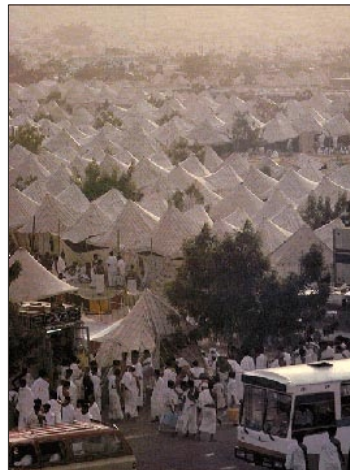
## Being Separated from Companions

Due to the numbers involved it is very easy to become separated from travelling companions. It is wise to have a plan in place before arriving so that each member of the party knows where to meet.

## Overview

It is extremely important that all those undertaking this pilgrimage recognise the necessity to stay constantly alert to the personal health and accident risks which are present and do everything within their power to avoid them. The **Tropical Medical Bureau centres** throughout Ireland carry both the required and the recommended vaccines for travellers to the Hajj. *Appointments should be made well in advance of visa application to ensure that these are given in sufficient time.*

**Appointments: phone 1850-487 674 or [www.tmb.ie](http://www.tmb.ie)**



National Travel Vaccine Appointment Tel 1-850-48 76 74

Web Address: [www.tmb.ie](http://www.tmb.ie)

This leaflet has been prepared using information supplied from W.H.O. Center for Disease Control (US) and other International sources.

- ✓ Travel Accessories
- ✓ Tropical Diagnostic Laboratory
- ✓ Tropical Disease Screening Centre
- ✓ W.H.O. registered Yellow Fever Vaccination Centre
- ✓ International Vaccination and Malaria Advice Centres

Hajj/TMB/update10Nov2009

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Blanchardstown  
Bray  
Carlow  
Clarehall  
Cork  
Dun Laoghaire  
Galway

Gorey  
Grafton Street  
Inchicore  
Kerry  
Letterkenney  
Limerick  
Maynooth  
Naas

Ongar  
Shannon  
Sligo  
Stillorgan  
Tinahely  
Walkinstown  
Waterford