CONTENTS

01      INTRODUCTION

02      PREPARATIONS FOR TRAVEL
TRAVEL AND HEALTH DOCUMENTS
VACCINATIONS REQUIRED FOR TRAVEL TO SAUDI ARABIA
MALARIA AND YELLOW FEVER
ESSENTIAL KIT LIST
FOOTWEAR AND OTHER PRE-DEPARTURE TOP TIPS

03      DURING THE HAJJ
RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS: COUGHS AND COLDs
AVOIDING THE HAJJ CROWDS
FOOD, DRINK AND WATER
PROBLEMS WITH THE SUN AND HEAT
WHERE TO SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE WHEN ILL

04      FURTHER INFORMATION AND REFERENCES
Over 25,000 British Muslims are amongst the 2 million people who perform the Hajj pilgrimage each year making it the largest annual gathering on earth. You need to know what you are in for.

Almost all pilgrims will experience some form of illness due to a number of factors unique to the Hajj. These include:

1. Pilgrims from 140 countries, each bringing the illnesses associated with their homelands.
2. Overcrowding.
3. Inadequate nutrition.
4. Poor accessibility to clean drinking water.
5. Heat exhaustion.
6. The considerable physical exertions and travel, often undertaken by foot, necessary to fulfill the Hajj rites.

The commonest illnesses at the Hajj are respiratory infections, gastroenteritis and diarrhoea. Others include heat related and physical injuries.

This advice leaflet is designed to highlight important areas that will maximise your chances of performing an illness-free Hajj. This includes pre-departure planning advice as well as how to battle ill health when in Saudi Arabia.

Coughs and sneezes spread diseases

Stop germs spreading

always carry tissues
cover your coughs and sneezes
throw used tissues in a bin
always clean your hands
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Left: Following these simple steps will dramatically reduce your chances of contracting respiratory illnesses and diarrhoea.
TRAVEL AND HEALTH DOCUMENTS

1. Always carry a photocopy of your passport and other travel papers.
2. Carry a printout of your travel vaccinations within your passport.
3. Ask for a medical report from your doctor to include a list of your illnesses and usual medications to keep with your travel documents. For serious illnesses, note the name of your hospital, consultant, and hospital number. Provide your travel operator a copy of this list.
4. If you suffer from any illnesses such as heart, lung, liver disease or diabetes, meet with your GP and or specialist well in advance to explain what the Hajj entails and plan the health considerations for your journey.
5. Ensure you have a plentiful supply of your usual medications to last for your whole trip. Be aware of how to store medication as some may require refrigeration. Keep your medications with you in your hand luggage.
6. Wear a medical alert necklace or bracelet that allows people to easily identify your health needs should you require emergency assistance.

VACCINATIONS REQUIRED FOR TRAVEL TO SAUDI ARABIA

Only pilgrims with valid immunisation certificates for meningitis (ACWY) will be granted a Hajj visa. Children under 2 years require the meningitis A vaccine.

Ideally, pilgrims should also be vaccinated against:

1. Tetanus
2. Diphtheria
3. Pertussis (Whooping cough)
4. MMR (measles, mumps, rubella)
5. Typhoid
6. Tuberculosis (BCG)
7. Polio vaccine
8. Hepatitis A and B

All pilgrims aged 65 or over and those suffering from asthma, COPD, heart, liver or kidney disease, diabetes and HIV, should be immunized against influenza and pneumococcus (Ref: DOH). All other pilgrims may choose to be vaccinated should they wish.
MALARIA AND YELLOW FEVER

There is a risk of contracting malaria in some southern provinces of Saudi Arabia. Makkah and Madinah are however low risk areas and so anti-malarial tablets are not needed when visiting these areas alone. Nevertheless, general precautions against malaria should be taken. These include using insect repellents and sleeping within mosquito nets. Pilgrims who are travelling to or from countries affected by malaria before or after the Hajj may however need to take anti-malarial medication whilst in Saudi.

Those pilgrims travelling to Saudi Arabia within 10 days of visiting a country in a yellow fever area are required to be vaccinated against yellow fever.

It is important to seek medical attention for any unexpected symptoms, especially those such as diarrhoea, jaundice (yellow skin) or a high fever on your return home.

ESSENTIAL KIT LIST

1. Paracetamol/Aspirin
2. Clove oil for dental pain
3. Plasters/adhesive dressings
4. Scissors
5. Antiseptic cream
6. Water sterilisation tablets
7. Insect repellent spray/cream
8. Antibacterial mouthwash
9. Throat lozenges
10. Diarrhoea relief tablets
   eg: loperamide
11. Oral rehydration sachets
12. Muscle rub/pain relief cream
13. Vaseline
14. Moisturiser
FOOTWEAR AND OTHER PRE-DEPARTURE TOP TIPS

Footwear: There will be considerable travelling during the Hajj, often on foot, leading to many pilgrims developing swollen, sore feet with cracked skin. To reduce the chances of this happening ensure you take sturdy, comfortable footwear. ‘Break in’ your sandals before you travel. Avoid material that rubs on your skin and remove sand if it gets into your footwear. Keep your feet dry and moisturise them daily. Elevate your legs when resting and never walk barefooted. If you develop a blister, clean the area and apply a firm plaster. Diabetics must take great care to avoid injury to their feet.

To avoid losing your footwear, carry them with you in a bag when you are in the great mosques. Whilst you undertake the Hajj rites, try to use a ground mat to cushion your feet.

Women’s health: The oral contraceptive pill and other methods are available to delay menstruation and prevent it from occurring during the Hajj. Consult your GP or family planning clinic early before your departure to discuss options.

Eyewear: Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes. Due to the dusty and sandy conditions, contact lenses are best avoided and spectacles are a better option.

Prepare yourself for the physical and mental challenges of the Hajj. Start light exercise training such as a jog or a brisk walk for half an hour a day one month before the Hajj. You will notice the benefits!

Deep Vein Thrombosis: There is a small risk of a DVT (blood clot in the leg) occurring during your air flights. To reduce any risk, drink plenty of water, take regular walks around the aircraft cabin when possible and perform simple stretches and mobility exercises in your seat. Pilgrims with a history of blood clots or circulatory problems should consult their GP and can buy special stockings from a pharmacy or take low dose aspirin before the flight.
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03 DURING THE HAJJ

RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS: COUGHS AND COLDS
Most pilgrims share hotel rooms with at least 3 - 4 people at the Hajj. When in Mina and Arafat, you may share a tent with up to 150 people. Here clean water and adequate sanitation facilities may also prove difficult to access. This overcrowding facilitates the easy spread of infectious diseases and so it is not surprising that over 60% of pilgrims develop a cough or cold during the Hajj.

What can be done to avoid a cold or the flu?
Unfortunately there are no easy answers. As the cough and flu are mainly viral illnesses, antibiotics cannot treat them. However, the following simple steps will greatly reduce the chances of you catching and spreading them:

1. Be prepared! Get the flu and pneumonia jabs before you travel! The jabs are FREE from your GP and you can get them any time up to your departure:
   - if you are over 65 years of age or
   - if you have:
     - diabetes
     - asthma or breathing problems
     - heart disease
     - kidney disease

2. Follow these simple hygiene measures:
   - Wash your hands regularly and use hand cleansing gel in between, especially after coughing or sneezing.
   - Always carry tissues.
   - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
   - Use disposable tissues and throw them in a bin afterwards.
   - Do not share towels, cutlery or cups with other pilgrims
   - Use a face mask and change it every 6hrs.
AVOIDING THE HAJJ CROWDS

Overcrowding and stampedes, particularly at the jamaraat, are one of the main causes of minor injuries during the Hajj. You will often find yourself in large crowds and at risk of getting lost.

1. Avoid fast moving crowds and travelling too close to other people.
2. Try to always travel in pairs and arrange a central meeting point with your group at set times in case you become separated from them.
3. If possible, travel at night or after initial rushes have subsided.
4. Travel as lightly as possible and only take essential items with you when performing the Hajj rites.
5. Stay calm, have patience and do the Hajj at your own pace. Remember that the Hajj is a once in a lifetime experience so take your time to savour and enjoy each moment!

OTHER TOP TIPS

Shaving your hair: Insist that the barber who shaves your head uses a fresh blade for each pilgrim. The re-using of a blade will expose you to serious blood borne infections such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C.

’Crotch Itch’: Due to the constraints of the ihram, men are at risk of developing inflamed, itchy, tender groins. Lubricating the inside of the thighs with Vaseline will help prevent this.

Make sure you take ample time to rest and sleep.
FOOD, DRINK AND WATER

FOOD
Try to have a diet consisting of high fibre and complex carbohydrate foods. Eat foods such as potatoes, pasta, rice, bran, wholemeal bread, lentils and green vegetables. As these foods take longer to digest, they will keep you fuller for longer and will provide you with the increased energy you need at the Hajj. Make sure to eat fresh fruit with meals, but peel before eating.

Always eat freshly prepared food and make sure any meat you eat is thoroughly cooked. Avoid exposed food from service counters, fried or fatty foods, salads and uncooked vegetables as these may have been washed in contaminated water.

Dried fruit such as apricots and raisins are excellent snacks between meals as they are a good source of energy as well as vitamins and minerals.

DRINK
There is a real risk of dehydration at the Hajj. Always carry water with you when away from your hotel. Only drink mineral water from a sealed bottle or from the water fountains found in the great mosques. Water used for brushing your teeth or making ice should be boiled or sterilized. Zamzam water is of course safe to drink.

Try to drink at least 5-6 glasses (2 litres) of water daily. Fruit juices and milk are also good alternatives to water.
Heat related problems are the most common cause of death at the Hajj. Even in winter, the Saudi temperature may exceed 30°C during the day. As such, heat exhaustion and sunstroke are common. This risk is exacerbated further as men are prohibited from directly covering their heads at the Hajj.

Heatstroke most often occurs in unacclimatised pilgrims who suddenly undertake strenuous physical activity without any preparation. It takes up to 10 days for the body to acclimatise to the heat so be prepared for this.

Sunburn is also a problem. Long term risks from this include prematurely aged skin and skin cancer. Before leaving your hotel, always apply sun cream and then re-apply every few hours. Ideally one should use sun block or a cream with sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.

**Above:** To avoid heatstroke, make sure to drink plenty of water.
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**Signs and symptoms of sunstroke:**
1. Feeling of extreme heat.
2. Drowsiness, extreme tiredness or loss of consciousness.
3. Weakness and muscle cramps.
4. Fitting.
5. Headache, dizziness, nausea and vomiting.

**What to do: Get medical help urgently!**
Heatstroke is caused by salt and water depletion in the body. Ensure that the person drinks plenty of water. If possible, give them a rehydration solution that will replenish the lost salt and water. If this is not possible, mixing two spoons of salt to one of sugar in a glass of drinking water will work equally well.

Whilst waiting for medical help take the person into the shade and fan their body. Loosen their clothing and spray cool water over their body.

**How to avoid heatstroke and sunburn:**
1. Avoid direct sun exposure.
2. Use a good quality umbrella, preferably white in colour.
3. Stay in the shade and go out during evenings and nights.
4. Keep your body cool.
5. Wear loose fitting clothing.
6. Cover your body in the sun.
7. Drink plentiful water.
8. Moderately increase your salt intake.
9. Avoid travelling in open-top buses.

WHERE TO SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE

Telephone numbers for the emergency services in Saudi Arabia are:
1. Ambulance 997
2. Police 999

There are medical facilities for pilgrims at the Great Mosque in Makkah should you require medical assistance. Clinics have a white sign with a red crescent and can be found at the following locations:

1. Babul Ajyad: Door number 5.
2. Babul Abdul Aziz: Door number 1.
3. Babul Fatah: Door number 45.

Hospitals in Makkah include the Ajyad Hospital and Noor Hospital. In Madinah there is no medical clinic at the Great Mosque but a Saudi-German Hospital is located nearby.

Additionally, the Foreign Office sends an official annual British Hajj Delegation to Saudi Arabia which runs a medical clinic. The delegation’s base for 2007 will be at the Grand Shubeika Hotel, Khalid bin Waleed Street, Makkah. The nearest gate to this is Babul Umrah.

For less urgent medical problems, you may seek advice from:
- Your doctor travelling with your tour group.
- Emergency stations located along the Hajj routes.

Other useful telephone numbers in an emergency:
- FCO British Hajj Delegation: + 966 (0) 2 549 6000
- British Consulate-General, Jeddah: +966 (0) 2 622 5550
04 FURTHER INFO.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND REFERENCES

1. Department of Health: Advice for travellers to Hajj or Umrah
   www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/Healthadvicefortravellers/DH_4114831

2. Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Hajj Information Leaflet
   For more advice to British pilgrims, visit: www.fco.gov.uk

   www.eurosurveillance.org/ew/2006/061130.asp


6. Ministry of Hajj for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
   www.hajinformation.com/

7. USA Center for Disease Control and Prevention
   wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/contentHajj.aspx

8. National Travel Health Network and Centre
   www.nathnac.org/pro/clinical_updates/hajj241106.htm

9. Department of Health: Influenza advice
   www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/12/32/35/04123235.pdf
HEALTH AT HAJJ AND UMRAH RESEARCH GROUP

Working to provide you a healthier Hajj experience