

THE LONDON CENTRAL MOSQUE TRUST &
THE ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTRE
A Registered Charity.
146 Park Road, London NW8 7RG.
Tel: 020 7724 3363 (10 Lines). Fax: 020 7724 0493



HEALTH ADVICE FOR HAJJ AND UMRAH TRAVELLERS

By

Dr Yunes Teinaz

DEFINITION OF HAJJ:

Literally: The word "Hajj" means heading for an honourable person or place.

Legally: According to the Islamic Shariah law Hajj means worshipping Allah by performing the Hajj rituals, which are defined as specific acts performed at a specific time and place in a specific way.

There is agreement among Islamic Juristic schools over the Hajj definition.

RITUALS OF UMRAH

In Arabic the word `Umrah is derived from l`timar which means a visit. However, Umrah technically means paying a visit to Ka`bah, performing Tawaf [Circumambulation] around it, walking between Safa and Marwah seven times. A performer of `Umrah puts off his Ihram by having his hair shaved or cut

Hajj, the journey to the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, at least is a once in a lifetime is one of the five "pillars", or duties, of Islam, and an obligation for all adult Muslims who are physically and financially able. Each year, more than two million people globally, including more than 20,000 Britons take part in the Hajj. The largest annual international gathering of its kind in the world.

The influx of millions of Muslims from around the world within a confined area over a short period every year on a religious pilgrimage called the "Hajj" or "Umrah" to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, increases the risk of respiratory and gastrointestinal infections, in particular meningococcal disease.

The mass migration during the Hajj and Umrah is unparalleled in scale, and pilgrims face numerous health hazards. The extreme congestion of people and vehicles during this time amplifies health risks, such as those from lack of food and water safety, in addition to infectious diseases, that vary each year. Since the Hajj is dictated by the lunar calendar, which is shorter than the Gregorian calendar, it presents public-health policy planners with a moving target.

Adequate preparations will, make the performance of Hajj a fruitful and memorable experience

This guidance explains and offers advice on some of the risks concerning PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY for travellers to Hajj or Umrah.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

PASSPORT & VISA

Ensure that the necessary visas are in place, and your passports are in good condition.

INSURANCE

There are Shariah compliant insurance policies available. Get travel insurance for all aspects of your journey. Make sure you have full medical insurance covering all activities you are likely to take part in, and make sure it is a repatriation policy. The biggest risks to travellers abroad are theft and road accidents. Make copies of your passport and tickets travel insurance documents, take one with you and leave a copy with a contact in the UK. If you can, scan them and e-mail them back to yourself. Do the same with your travel insurance documents etc. Keep a copy of your travel insurance company telephone number and your insurance document number plus emergency numbers, such as the Hajj Delegation Clinic, Consular service. and ticket details with you at all times and with family and friends.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Travellers to the annual Hajj Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca are strongly advised to make sure they've taken all the appropriate Mental, spiritual, physical early preparation and awareness of health & safety issues before making the journey, by seeking pre-travel health advice at least 10 days before travelling .

It is highly recommended that prospective Hajjis must get education and training about all aspects of Hajj and Umra before leaving for Saudi Arabia.

Look up information, medical and otherwise on the area you will be travelling to and draw up a list of items you need to take (including medical kit). Be aware of the medical conditions you are likely to encounter and read up on them.

IMMUNISATIONS & EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Hajj and Umrah travelers should be sure that they are properly immunised for pilgrimage, and that you have vaccination cards with you. By doing this they will not only protect themselves from diseases, but also prevent passing them on to fellow pilgrims.

Consult their doctor for existing medical conditions, individuals on medication should make sure that they have adequate quantities to get them through the Hajj period. Existing medication should be clearly labelled for each individual.

Responsible tour operators must encourage and ensure that pilgrims have followed such advice.

PERSONAL HEALTH

Have a full dental check up a couple of months before you travel. If you suffer from any ailment, such as a heart or chest condition or diabetes, tell your doctor or specialist that you are planning to undertake this journey and ask their advice on how to reduce your chances of becoming ill. Also ask them for a report to carry with you, with a list of your usual medications. Make sure you have adequate supplies of any regular or intermittent medications you take.

GOOD QUALITY FOOTWEAR

Please ensure you have good quality footwear as you may have to walk long distances.

FIRST AID KIT

Access to medical care is limited therefore you are strongly advised to carry a medical kit appropriate to the nature of your trip. Sterile medical kits containing syringes, needles, sutures and dressings are available to purchase from most chemists in the UK.

Booking and Organising Hajj Packages

Hajj Tour Operator Security

UK tour operators offering Hajj packages that flights must hold a Government Air Travel Organisers' Licence (ATOL) issued by the Civil Aviation. They must also lodge a security bond with the CAA to protect payments they receive from pilgrims. Check that you have the correct tickets and ticket details and make sure that your tour operator has this licence. Have contact details for your tour operator in the UK and their representatives in Makkah.

KEEPING HEALTHY WHEN ABROAD

AIR TRAVEL

To reduce the risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis it is wise on any long haul flight to: be comfortable in your seat. Upper body and breathing exercises can further improve circulation. Exercise your legs, feet and toes while sitting every half an hour or so and take short walks whenever feasible.

LAND TRAVEL

Avoid sitting continuously for more than two hours without movement. When the vehicle stops for re-fueling or for a break, leave the vehicle and walk around even for a short while, and massage your head and neck to avoid any muscle cramps. Wear sunglasses when possible to protect your eyes from sun and dust.

WHEN ARRIVING AT THE HOLY LAND

Carry out the required steps of hajj in a moderate manner, do not exhaust yourself to reach the black stone, be aware of yourself and those around you during the circulation of Kaaba, and while sprinting between Al Safa & Al Marwa or during the throwing of the stones, to avoid any misconduct.

Always carry with you your personal identity card, your health card and never remove your wrist tag.

Do not carry around your money while going for prayer or to the market to protect it from being lost.

ACCOMMODATION SAFETY

Accommodation area in the Holy Land is different from your home land, where a room or a single tent may be occupied by more than a person and this used for eating, sleeping and sitting, therefore, you should take the following precautions:

Do not smoke cigarettes or Hubble Bubble (Shisha) inside the room or tent.

Open windows occasionally for refreshing up the place.

Ensure the place is always clean.

Do not use any flame emitting unit inside the area.

Food SAFETY

Contaminated food is the commonest source of many diseases abroad. You can help prevent it by before eating, ensure the following guidelines:

- 1, Food is hygienic, utensils are clean and your hands are clean.
2. Avoid leftovers and reheated foods
- 3, Ensure meat and is fresh food thoroughly cooked
4. Eat cooked vegetables, avoid salads
- 5, Only eat fruit you can peel
6. Never drink unpasteurised milk
7. Avoid ice-cream and shellfish
8. Avoid buying food from street vendor's stalls unless it is thoroughly cooked in front of you

9, Food bought from outside stalls and fruit bought from side-street vendors carry the risk of infection. The fruit may also have insecticides or pesticides sprayed on them. Thorough washing of the fruit before eating must be done to minimize infection.

10, check the production and expiry dates on all canned foods, do not buy cans that are bulging, dented or rusted.

11. Dispose of any food that has changed colour, smell or taste

DRINKING WATER

1. Please make sure that drinking water is safe. Drink adequate amounts of fluids especially water throughout your stay. Diseases can be caught from drinking contaminated water (or swimming in it).

2. Tap water is not safe to drink anywhere in Saudi Arabia. Drinking water has to be bought in the form of bottled water or canned drinks (and drink them from the original container).

3. Because of the hot weather conditions, it becomes necessary to drink water in abundance

4. Ice that is available to cool the Zam Zam water is not always of good quality. Unscrupulous people may make the ice with only brackish water or mix the brackish water with drinking water to save on costs. These results in the brackish water contaminating bottled water or Zam Zam water.

5. Drinking Brackish water causes a sore throat, abdominal pains and a cough from the irritation in the throat.

6. Drink Zam Zam water directly from the well in the Haram Shareef or taking the water from the numerous taps available outside the Haram Shareef. Zam Zam water that is available in storage containers in the Haram Shareef are cooled by adding ice. This ice may not always be of good quality.

7. Although the local authorities provide disposable cups for drinking Zam Zam in the Haram, people unfamiliar with this practice often mix the used cups with the unused ones resulting in confusion. If one is unsure, rinse out the cup well before use. It is through the sharing of cups that infections can spread from one pilgrim to another.

8. Unless you know the water supply is safe where you are staying, only use known brands of bottled water.

9. Make sure you carry with you plenty of clean drinking water.

10 This advice applies to ice cubes in drinks and water for cleaning your teeth

HYGIENE

Many diseases are transmitted by what is known as the 'faecal-oral' route. To help prevent this, always wash your hands with soap and clean water after going to the toilet, before eating and before handling food.

DIARRHOEA AND VOMITING

Travellers' diarrhoea is 4 or more loose stools in a 24 hour period often accompanied by stomach pain, cramps and vomiting. It usually lasts 2 to 4 days and whilst it is not a life threatening illness, it can disrupt your trip for several days.

Travellers' diarrhoea is the most common illness that you will be exposed to abroad and there is no vaccine against it! Diarrhoea and vomiting are caused by eating or drinking food and liquids contaminated by bacteria, viruses or parasites. Risk of illness is higher in some countries than others:

The unhygienic act of spitting phlegm onto the pavement is a sure way of spreading diseases. In situations where there are crowds of people, infections are bound to spread. Remember that germs spread by droplets from our mouth as we speak or when we cough especially if phlegm is present, or by direct contact as in kissing or sharing a cup, spoon, fork, etc...

The main danger if the illness is dehydration and this if very severe can kill if it is not treated. Treatment is therefore re-hydration. In severe cases and particularly in young children and the elderly, commercially prepared re-hydration solution is extremely useful. This can be bought in tablet or sachet form at a chemist shop e.g. DIORALYTE; or ELECTROLADE. (Dioralyte Relief is a new formula containing rice powder which also helps to relieve the diarrhoea, particularly useful in children). Prepare according to instructions.

1. Thorough washing of hands with soap helps tremendously in preventing the spread of infections.
2. Protect children, as they are the ones who come closest to us.
3. Avoid close contact with people who are ill. Visit them but keep your distance.
4. People who are ill should try not to mix with people who are well. In this way, the illness can be contained
5. If you are ill and had a visitor, protect your visitor by staying a fair distance away. Avoid close contact and tell visitors that the illness may be contagious. That will definitely work in keeping visitors at bay.

6. If one has diarrhoea, one must drink extra fluids. Try not to take anything to stop the diarrhoea unless one is having very frequent diarrhoea (more than 6 times in 12 hours).consult a nearest doctor.

7. Diarrhoea is a method by which the body is trying to get rid of the bugs. By stopping it, one may be helping the bugs to stay in the body causing one to become more ill.

8. If there is appetite loss, the forced intake of food will cause the person to become more ill. If an appetite is present, one may eat food, but take in carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables only.

9. Avoid protein foods such as meat, chicken, fish, eggs, dairy products and a fried and fatty food until a normal motion is passed. Then, a normal diet may be resumed.

10. With diarrhoea and vomiting, drink extra fluids preferably with electrolytes.

11. Do seek medical help if the affected person has:

A temperature

Blood in the diarrhoea

Diarrhoea for more than 48 hours (or 24 hours in children)

Becomes confused

PERSONAL SAFETY

Leading causes of death in travellers are due to drowning and traffic accidents. You can help prevent them by following these precautionary guidelines:

Avoid hiring motorcycles and mopeds

If hiring a car, rent a large one if possible, ensure the tyres, brakes and seat belts are in good condition

Use reliable taxi firms

Know where emergency facilities are

Avoid hiring motorcycles and mopeds

Avoid food 1 hour before taking a bath or swimming

COMMON DISEASES AND THEIR PREVENTION

Respiratory Problems.

The Presence of hot and dry air in a place full of people helps to spread disease. Therefore, stay away from sick people as far as possible; do not use their personal belongings, drink large amounts of liquids, and do not use antibiotics without the instruction of a physician.

TUBERCULOSIS (TB)

A bacterial disease spread through sneeze and cough droplets. Even though it may affect any part of the body, most commonly it affects the lungs. It occurs in many parts of the world and you can acquire the disease through close contact with an infected person, such as living in the same household. The BCG vaccine is not believed to give very good protection against TB so if you have a persistent cough when you return seek medical attention.

Heat Exhaustion.

Sunburn and heat-stroke cause serious problems in travellers. Both are preventable - to avoid, use the following precautionary guidelines:

Even when Hajj occurs during winter, the average temperature is over 30°C during the day and 20°C at night.

Avoid going out between 11am - 3pm, when the sun's rays are strongest

Take special care of CHILDREN and those with pale skin/red hair

Heat exhaustion is caused if a person exerts strenuous muscle activity in hot weather. Symptoms are headaches, tiredness, exhaustion cramps in the leg muscles and feeling of thirst. Use umbrellas while going out at noon for Mid-Day Prayer.

Avoid as far as possible strenuous activities in hot weather and go for buying commodities and gifts after Ishaa Prayer.

Consume a Lot of Liquids. If you feel any dizziness go to a cool place and drink extra liquids, if still there is no change in condition, consult a physician.

Take an umbrella and sun cream to protect against the sun.

SOIL-MEDIATED PARASITIC WORMS

PARASITES & OTHER DISEASES are very common in the tropics local population in many travel destinations and although you should not worry, it is advisable to be aware of some of these diseases and how they can be avoided

Be aware of washing your hands before you eat and don't go barefoot as some worms will penetrate your skin. See your GP if you have any intestinal symptoms that continue on your return to the UK, and let them know where you have travelled to.

Blood Borne Infections

Pilgrims also need to be aware of the risks of important blood borne infections such as HIV and hepatitis B and C, especially as one of the rites of Hajj is for men to have

their head shaved. Hepatitis B is one hundred times more infectious than HIV, and is a leading cause of liver cancer.

Scuffing of thigh area:

As men are not allowed to wear any underwear during, Ihram, scuffing of the skin on the inner side of the thigh can occur. The sweat and the rubbing of the thighs together during walking cause the problem. To prevent this, men are advised to use Vaseline or any other non-perfumed moisturiser liberally to the inner side of the thighs frequently throughout the state of Ihram.

WHEN YOU RETURN

You are strongly advised to make an appointment with a Practice Nurse to arrange for a screening stool culture and a full blood count. This is to check that you haven't picked up any diseases or travelling companions. If you have been travelling and have returned feeling unwell, especially with an unexplained fever or prolonged diarrhoea you should make an appointment with a doctor.

GENERAL INTEREST [www.LINKS](#)

The London Central Mosque Trust & the Islamic Cultural Centre

www.iccservices.org.uk

Aviation Health Institute www.aviation-health.org

Centre for Infectious diseases - Travellers' Health www.cdc.gov/travel/

International Society of Travel Medicine www.istm.org/

Malaria Foundation International www.malaria.org/

GOVERNMENT [www.LINKS](#)

For important TRAVEL ADVISE please visit:

www.berr.gov.uk/consumers/buying-selling/holidaystravel/index.html

Government Air Travel Organisers' Licence (ATOL) www.atol.org.uk

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wah and Guidance

<http://hajj.al-islam.com/default.asp?lang=eng>

NHS National Library for Health leaflet available in several community languages to download from:

<http://www.library.nhs.uk/ethnicity/ViewResource.aspx?resID=262466>

Department of Health

Going to Hajj or Umrah? This leaflet is available in several community languages to download from:

Link to department of health page to download information in pdf

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4103432

This leaflet explains and offers advice on some of the risks concerning meningitis for travellers to Hajj or Umrah.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

HAJJ PILGRIMAGE 2007: ADVICE TO BRITISH HAJJIS

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1101396253177>

CIA World fact book www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html

Department of Health Advice for Travellers

www.doh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/healthadviceForTravellers

Fit for Travel www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk/

Foreign Office www.fco.gov.uk/

Health Protection Agency www.phls.co.uk/

NATHNAC (National Travel Health Network and Centre) www.nathnac.org/

The Meteorological Office www.met-office.gov.uk/

United Nations Web Site www.un.org/

WHO (World Health Organisation) www.who.int/

WHO Immunisation Schedules Country by Country

www-nt.who.int/vaccines/globalsummary/pgs2000.cfm

WHO Tropical Diseases Images & information www.who.int/tdr/media/image.html