



ALERT FOR CLINICIANS

KEY POINTS

- The Hajj pilgrimage is taking place in Saudi Arabia from 7 to 12 July 2022.
- Clinicians should be alert to the small risk of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in returning Hajj pilgrims who present with an influenza-like illness (ILI).
- For patients with an ILI who have travelled to Saudi Arabia within the past 14 days: isolate the person immediately, use appropriate infection prevention and control precautions, take an exposure history, and liaise with an Infectious Disease Physician/Clinical Microbiologist.
- Notify any suspect cases to the local Public Health Unit urgently.

Background

- MERS-CoV is a zoonotic coronavirus which can be transmitted to humans via exposure to infected camels and camel products in the Middle East. Person-to-person transmission can occur, particularly in health care settings.
- Infection causes an acute lower respiratory disease, with radiological, clinical or histopathological evidence of pneumonia or pneumonitis. It can be severe with a case-fatality rate of around 36%. Those at risk of severe disease include the elderly and those who are immunocompromised or have comorbidities.
- Over 2,000 Australians are expected to travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj. MERS-CoV transmission continues to occur in Saudi Arabia with six cases reported between August 2021 and May 2022.
- There has not previously been imported cases associated with the Hajj in Australia, however other countries have experienced large nosocomial outbreaks as a result of one imported case.
- Although the risk is small, clinicians should be alert to the risk of MERS-CoV in returning pilgrims and ensure a travel history is taken from all patients with an infectious illness.

For people returning from Saudi Arabia who present with an ILI:

- Immediately **isolate** the person in a single room with ensuite facilities, preferably in a negative isolation pressure room.
- Implement standard, contact, droplet and **airborne transmission-based precautions. This includes the use of gown, gloves, protective eyewear and a particulate filter respirator.**
- **Ask about exposure** to camels, hospitals, or people with acute respiratory illness.
- Liaise with an Infectious Disease Physician/Clinical Microbiologist for further advice.
- **NOTIFY SUSPECT CASES URGENTLY** to the local public health unit or the on-call Public Health Physician on 9328 0553 if after hours.

Metropolitan Perth 9222 8588 or 1300 623292	Kimberley 9194 1630	South West 9781 2359
Goldfields 9080 8200	Midwest 9956 1985	Wheatbelt 9690 1720
Great Southern 9842 7500	Pilbara 9174 1660	After hours (on-call) 9328 0553

Further information is available at: [Department of Health and Aged Care | Information for Health Professionals](#)

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