

News release

8 September 2009

Foreign Office advice for people attending the Hajj

Every year, millions of Muslims – including around 25,000 from the United Kingdom - make the journey to Mecca, Saudi Arabia for the annual pilgrimage or Hajj.

To help the pilgrims undertake this important journey safely, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has issued a new guidance leaflet, which is now available to download from the NHS Kirklees website http://www.kirklees.nhs.uk/fileadmin/documents/Swine_Flu/Leaflets/090907_hajj-advice.pdf

This year Hajj pilgrims are required to obtain a seasonal flu vaccination with a certificate in their country of origin at least two weeks prior to applying for a Hajj visa. GPs working in the NHS Kirklees area will be able to provide this from the end of September and anyone considering attending the Hajj should contact their GP to make arrangements to be vaccinated.

There is also a high likelihood of transmission of swine flu due to the large number of people attending. Pilgrims are advised to continue to follow hand and respiratory infection control advice and “Catch it, Bin it, Kill it”. Click here for further information:

http://www.kirklees.nhs.uk/fileadmin/documents/New/Your_health/Swine_flu/Stopping%20the%20spread%20of%20infections.pdf

Anyone in the high risk categories is advised not to make the journey this year. Those at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill with swine flu include:

- pregnant women

People with:

- chronic lung disease or had drug treatment for asthma in the past three years
- cystic fibrosis
- a suppressed immune system (whether caused by disease or treatment)

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- diabetes
- sickle cell disease
- chronic neurological disease e.g. multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, stroke, muscular dystrophy
- chronic heart disease
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease

As well as:

- children aged under five and people aged over 65.

For all the latest advice and guidance on swine flu, visit the NHS Kirklees website on

<http://www.kirklees.nhs.uk/your-health/swine-flu/>

In addition, pilgrims should be vaccinated with the quadrivalent meningococcal vaccine (ACWY), which protects against four different strains of meningitis (A, C, W135 and Y). You will be required to produce a valid vaccination certificate and you should consult your GP if you are in any doubt.

Individuals on medication should make sure that they have adequate quantities to cover the time they will be on their pilgrimage.

The Department of Health has advice for travellers, which can be found at:

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers/fs/en

Ends

Notes to News Desk

Hajj is considered one of the five 'pillars' of Islam. Muslims are required to make the pilgrimage once in a lifetime, if they are physically and financially able to make the journey to Mecca.

NHS Kirklees is the main NHS body responsible for healthcare and health improvement for people living in the district. NHS Kirklees commissions - that is plans and pays for - any health services you might need. This includes hospitals, ambulances, mental health and other specialist services. NHS Kirklees also agree contracts with local GPs, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists to deliver high-quality services for local people.

**For more information please contact the Communications Team, NHS Kirklees
on 01484 466004/466223**