

# **Health advice for travelers in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia**

## **Virus MERS-Coronavirus (CoV)**

**Updated: 1.8.2019**

**Subdirectorat-General for Surveillance and Response to  
Public Health Emergencies**

## **Health advice for travellers on pilgrimage to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia due to human cases of the Middle East respiratory syndrome caused by the new coronavirus (MERS-CoV)**

### **Special attention must be placed on travellers on pilgrimage to Mecca**

Since September 2012 there have been cases of human infection due to a new coronavirus known as *MERS-CoV*. It involves a family of viruses, the clinical presentations of which are varied, from the common cold to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). There are nine countries affected to date, in particular Saudi Arabia.

The syndrome presents with respiratory symptoms (cough, difficulty breathing) and fever. These symptoms are more serious in those suffering from a chronic illness (diabetes, kidney, heart or lung disease and those with immunodeficiency disorders or patients being treated with immunosuppression). However, cases of asymptomatic infection have been documented.

There is increasing evidence that camels can play a role in transmitting to humans, although the mechanism and the transmission route are not known accurately. Transmission between people requires close contact and is not maintained.

Although the risk of being infected by the new coronavirus is considered to be very low, the following recommendations are given mainly for those individuals planning to travel to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

### **Before you travel**

- People with chronic illnesses (diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and immunodeficiency), young children and pregnant women can have a higher risk of being infected by the new coronavirus during their trip. Therefore, they should consult their doctor before leaving to check their health and decide whether going on the pilgrimage is inadvisable.
- Those travelling to Saudi Arabia must follow the general rules of hygiene that reduce the risk of getting MERS-CoV as well as other infections, such as the flu or travellers' diarrhoea. Specifically they should:
  - Wash their hands often with soap and water. If the hands are not visibly dirty, a hand sanitizer may be used.
  - Adhere to food safety rules, avoiding raw or undercooked food or foods that have been cooked in unhygienic conditions and correctly washing fruits and vegetables before eating them.
  - Observe good personal hygiene.
  - Avoid contact with farm, domestic or wild animals.

### **While you are away**

- Anyone with the symptoms of an acute respiratory infection (fever and cough) that make it unable for them to carry out their regular daily activity should:
  - Minimise their contact with others.

- Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they sneeze and/or cough, throwing the tissue in the wastebasket and washing their hands. If this is not possible, coughing or sneezing into the sleeve of the upper arm is advised, but not into the hands.
- See their group or local healthcare services.

**After the trip**

- Pilgrims returning home and showing symptoms of an acute respiratory infection (fever and cough) that make it unable for them to carry out their regular daily activity in the two weeks following their return should visit their healthcare professional.
- Those who have come into contact with a pilgrim or traveler with symptoms of an acute respiratory infection (fever and cough) that make it unable for them to carry out their regular daily activity and who develop the same symptoms should contact healthcare services for monitoring.



Figure 1. Map of the area with cases of MERS-CoV infection

**Useful web pages**

[FAQ on MERS-CoV](#) (in Catalan)