



## **ALERT FOR CLINICIANS** **MERS-CoV and the Hajj pilgrimage**

### **KEY POINTS**

- The Hajj pilgrimage is taking place in Saudi Arabia from 26 June to 1 July 2023.
- There is a 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 reporting travel to Saudi Arabia within the past 14 days: isolate the person immediately, use appropriate infection prevention and control precautions, take an exposure history, and consult with an Infectious Disease Physician/Clinical Microbiologist.
- Notify suspected cases **urgently** to the local [Public Health Unit](#) (or the on-call Public Health Physician on 9328 0553 if after hours).

### **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.
- Clinical presentation ranges from asymptomatic infection to acute upper respiratory illness, pneumonia or pneumonitis. It can be severe with mortality of around 35%.
- Those at higher 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.
- Five cases of MERS-CoV have been reported in Saudi Arabia between June 2022 and May 2023.
- No cases of MERS-CoV have ever been reported in Australia, however other countries have experienced large nosocomial outbreaks from 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 a gown, gloves, protective eyewear and particulate filter respirator.**
- **Ask about exposure** to camels, camel products (e.g. milk, urine or meat), 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.
- Further information about MERS-CoV, including factsheets for health professionals and an [information card](#) for travellers, is available at [www.health.gov.au/MERS](http://www.health.gov.au/MERS).

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Access Infectious Diseases Health Alerts online at: [https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F\\_I/Health-alerts-infectious-diseases](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Health-alerts-infectious-diseases)