

## No visa for Haj without vaccinations: Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has made it mandatory for all Haj and Umrah pilgrims from across the world to take vaccinations against such endemic diseases as meningitis, yellow fever and polio prior to coming to that country.

'A circular has been dispatched to all the Saudi missions from the foreign ministry to adhere strictly to the stipulations made by the Ministry of Health when issuing Umrah and Haj visas,' the Arab News quoted a spokesman for the Ministry of Health as saying.

Polio vaccination is a pre-requirement for children under 15 from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Yemen and African countries while yellow fever is identified with Nigeria, Kenya, Congo, Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia.

Vaccination against meningitis is compulsory for all pilgrims and should be taken 10 days prior to the pilgrim departing for Makkah and Madinah. This vaccination is valid for three years.

According to a health ministry spokesman, visas would be issued only after the pilgrims produced the valid vaccination certificates.

Prospective pilgrims have also been advised to take injections against seasonal influenza.

Earlier, head of Saudi Arabia's Haj Preparations Committee Ridah M. Khalil, chairing a meeting as part of the early preparations for Haj, said that only canned food would be allowed into the country.

He also pointed out that the health ministry carries out an intensive campaign against infectious diseases, such as meningitis, cholera, yellow fever and viral fever.

The government distributes over 1.5 million copies of brochures in 16 languages to carry the health messages to pilgrims.

Around two million Haj pilgrims visited Saudi Arabia in 2007.

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