

Boosting pilgrims' safety with the latest electronic disease surveillance at the Hajj

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In this Review, Professor Ziad Memish, Deputy Minister of Health for Public Health in Saudi Arabia and colleagues outline the latest real-time disease surveillance system that was recently piloted to successfully monitor and assess public health risks among the 5 million pilgrims from 184 countries during the Hajj 2012 and Hajj 2013.

The health-care web-based electronic surveillance system was introduced in 2012 to help officials respond more quickly and effectively to potential infectious disease threats. Hospitals, clinics, and medical centres in Mina, Arafat, and Muzdalifah that provide free medical care during the Hajj were able to rapidly relay demographic and health data to the operations centre in Makkah to guide further investigation and intervention. The new technology was successfully put to the test after MERS coronavirus was first discovered in September 2012. No cases of MERS infection were reported during the Hajj in 2012 and 2013.

According to Professor Memish, "After decades of managing millions of pilgrims who undertake the Hajj, Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of expertise in providing surveillance and health care during [mass gatherings](#), and in 2012 established the Global Center for Mass Gatherings Medicine. This centre is a virtual research network of academic and [public health](#) institutions from around the world who will conduct studies to develop optimum recommendations for the prevention, management, and control of infectious diseases for countries that host mass gatherings, and to help strengthen global health security."

More information: www.thelancet.com/series/mass-gatherings-medicine

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