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Senegal warns against Ebola as giant Muslim pilgrimage looms

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Senegal has warned millions of Muslim pilgrims expected to undertake the yearly Sufi pilgrimage to Touba this week to be especially wary of Ebola infection.

With millions of members of the Mouride Brotherhood expected to make the annual journey to Touba for Thursday's holiday, Senegal's Health Ministry issued a communique reminding travellers of "the context this year marked by the presence of the Ebola virus in some of Senegal's neighbours."

Though the nation has not declared any new cases since September 10 of the disease ravaging west Africa, the ministry urged people making the pilgrimage to "remain vigilant and respect preventive measures."

The deadly virus has already claimed over 6,330 lives worldwide, nearly all in nearby Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia.

In particular, the statement added, voyagers should frequently wash their hands, drink treated water exclusively, "consume only well washed food, and "avoid unauthorised slaughter of animals."

As the capital Dakar began emptying out Monday with masses of people setting out for Touba, the government also issued its annual appeal for increased vigilance on the roads.

In 2013, 26 people were killed in auto accidents during the two days

surrounding the festivity.

Touba, 195 kilometers (121 miles) east of Dakar, is the holy city of Mouridism, one of the most influential Sufi orders in the world.

Thursday's Grand Magal holiday marks the 1853 exile of Senegal's most celebrated Sufi, Amadou Bamba, to Gabon by French colonial rulers.

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