



27 February 2020

PRESS STATEMENT: CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19) AND PILGRIMAGE TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA.

The authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have suspended pilgrimages to the two holy cities. As the only British medical team that has provided on the ground healthcare for over a decade in Makkah and Mina during the Hajj period, the British Hajj Delegation is fully aware of the risks of transmission of Corona Virus in close proximity to infected individuals and fully supports the actions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Corona Virus is transmitted through droplets from infected individuals and will be passed by coughing, sneezing and physical contact. The nature of a pilgrimage especially in Makkah brings pilgrims into very close proximity often leading to physical contact. With pilgrims attending from across the world and with reported infected cases across most continents the probability of the virus being present and transmitted during a pilgrimage is a real risk. At present there is no cure for the virus and preventive measures are the most effective way to limit spread.

If you have developed flu like symptoms **and** travelled anywhere in the world over the past 2 weeks then:

1. **DO NOT** GO TO YOUR GP SURGERY
2. **DO NOT** GO TO YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT (A&E)
3. **RING 111** for guidance on what you should do

If you have a flu like illness then use a tissue if you are suffering with a cough or sneeze to avoid spread and thoroughly wash your hands regularly, avoid touching your mouth as infected droplets may transfer from mouth to hand. Avoid travel where possible if you are suffering with a flu like illness especially on trams, trains and buses.

Face masks have limited value during this infection other than preventing the wearer from touching their mouth.

If you have not yet booked a pilgrimage this year especially for Ramadan or Hajj then we would suggest you delay any further plans until we receive further guidance from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. If you already have bookings for travel to the Kingdom for pilgrimage, we would suggest liaising with your travel agent or insurance company to clarify your position on cancelling the pilgrimage should the suspension on travel be extended.

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