

Saudi Arabia Strengthens Preparedness to set Model in Managing the Spread of Covid-19

Saudi Arabia is drawing on its successful experience of managing MERS-CoV reported in 2012, have enhanced readiness to address Covid-19, strengthened emergency

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA, March 23, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has enhanced its readiness to address Covid-19, strengthening emergency preparedness measures and taking all due diligence actions that could serve as a model in containing its outbreak.

In this, the Ministry of Health (MOH) is drawing on its successful experience of managing the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus ([MERS-CoV](#)) reported in 2012, which included the management of Hajj pilgrims, and achieving a track-record of no documentary evidence of new cases.



Saudi Ministry of Health Logo

The Ministry's track-record in managing MERS-CoV, especially during the annual pilgrimages when millions of people arrive in the Kingdom from around the world, offered a template to now drive the concerted campaign to fight Covid-19.



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Dr. Tawfig AlRabiah, Minister of Health

As a study published in the Oxford Academic Journal of Travel Medicine observed¹: "With decades of experience in managing Hajj, SA [Saudi Arabia] has a robust surveillance system capable of rapidly detecting infectious diseases cases like MERS-CoV in its healthcare facilities in the Hajj premises."

Covid-19 is the second coronavirus outbreak that impacted in the region, following the MERS-CoV in 2012.

Subsequently, the MOH issued vaccination requirements and prescribed the health conditions for travelers to Saudi Arabia, including Hajj pilgrims, to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

Following effective directives from the MOH, there was no evidence recorded of MERS-CoV nasal carriage among Hajj pilgrims in 2013, including among the high-risk population².

As of March 23, with 511 Covid-19 cases reported in the Kingdom, the MOH has further ramped up its operations by deploying the highest precautionary standards and implementing proactive preventive measures to preempt the spread of the virus. Patients have been quarantined in

hospitals and all the people who have interacted with them have been tested. To-date 18 cases have been recovered.

Among key measures to monitor the situation, the MOH is carrying out strict surveillance measures on travelers entering the country and has set a rigorous protocol to manage the screening and assessment of visitors. As a precautionary measure visitors, including Umrah pilgrims, have been temporarily barred from entering the Kingdom. Issuance of tourist visas has also been suspended, along with the cancellation of almost all the future events scheduled to be held in the Kingdom.

Coordinating its efforts closely with the World Health Organization and ensuring strict adherence to International Health Regulations such as immediate notification of any related cases on a daily basis, the Ministry has a national Command and Control Center (CCC) that operates round-the-clock to assess the disease epidemiology. The CCC, a public health emergency operation center, also undertakes daily risk assessment and monitors the readiness of healthcare facilities in real-time.



The Ministry has also beefed up the supporting hospital infrastructure to provide care and ensure prevention. Twenty-five hospitals across the Kingdom have been fully equipped to quarantine patients. These hospitals have 8,000 intensive care beds, more than 2,000 isolation beds and a total of 80,000 beds.

“Saudi Arabia began taking precautionary measures well before any case of the virus was detected in the country,” said Dr. Tawfig AlRabiah, Minister of Health.

The CCC took timely and rapid action by enhancing mechanism of action from supervising the overall healthcare system to focusing on Coronavirus – by putting in place a strong monitoring system, taking preventive measures, and strengthening awareness of Covid-19 among the public. It also established a hotline to connect healthcare professionals with doctors from the Ministry to support them in providing the right care for patients in need. Suspected cases are notified electronically, and laboratory testing is performed in designated facilities.

The MOH collaborates with various national authorities to evaluate risks and has set specific criteria in place. “We have an international center for mass gathering medicine and another for prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, which evaluate risks on a daily basis and take appropriate decisions,” said Mohammed Abdelali, spokesperson of the Ministry of Health.

Awareness campaigns have also been launched to address any stigma associated with the disease and to provide any updates associated with the spread of Covid-19 globally³. Covid-19, which originated in China late last year, has infected more than 339,259 people and caused the death of over 14,706.

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Assistant Deputyship of International Collaborations
Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia
+966 11 212 5555

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