Religious gathering and the health threat

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The annual pilgrimage to Makkah is the largest congregation of people in the world. It is a fertile area for the propagation of communicable diseases. This mass gathering unless controlled poses a dangerous health threat not only to Saudi Arabia but also to the countries from which the pilgrims come from and the countries they transit on their return journey.

Meningococcal meningitis outbreak during the 1987 pilgrimage has exposed the Saudi authorities to a new form of communicable disease. It has necessitated the adoption of new measures both locally and internationally in order to combat such outbreaks. Although the Saudi health authorities are entrusted with providing optimal preventive and curative health services to the pilgrims, WHO and health authorities of other countries are also involved. This paper aims at elucidating the methods adopted by the Saudi health authorities during this event. It will also outline the measures to be adopted by various countries during such large religious gathering and the vaccine strategies for travelers and their drawbacks.