



## **Pfizer donates RM 230,000 for the protection of Tabung Haji pilgrims**

*28,000 sanitization kits were donated as part of Pfizer's ongoing programme to create awareness on the dangers of infectious diseases.*

**KUALA LUMPUR, 26 June 2014** - Pfizer recently donated RM 230, 000 worth of sanitation kits to Tabung Haji pilgrims as part of their efforts to create awareness on the importance of protection against infectious diseases. The donation was presented by Noor Yang Azwar Kamarudin, the Director of Corporate Affairs, Health & Value of Pfizer at the *Sahabat Korporat Tabung Haji 1435H event* that was held recently. The sanitization kits contained antibacterial wipes, vaccination cards, luggage tags, travelling bags plus toothbrushes and toothpaste. The donation marks Pfizer's first participation in the Tabung Haji Corporate Partner program as part of the brand's commitment towards working together for a healthier world and caring for the community.

The donation is part of Pfizer's initiative to create awareness on the dangers of infectious disease while travelling. Hajj pilgrims are especially vulnerable as they are exposed to health risks where thousands of pilgrims are gathered to perform the hajj. The health risk varies from influenza, meningitis, respiratory symptom and more. As part of the health requirements from the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health towards the health condition of incoming pilgrims during Hajj or Umrah; the contribution of sanitation kit acts as a prevention method against easily infected diseases and unhygienic conditions during the mass gathering.

Many health issues continue to be a concern during hajj pilgrimage such as Meningococcal disease, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (Mers-Cov), Tuberculosis (TB), Hepatitis A, Blood-borne diseases, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and last but not least, Pneumonia. Studies find that pneumonia is the most common respiratory tract infection that causes hospital admission during Hajj.<sup>i</sup> A study of hospital admissions in Makkah and Mina during the 2002 Hajj reported that 39% of hospitalizations were from pneumonia.<sup>ii</sup> In 2005 Hajj season, Pneumonia was reported with 53.9% positivity out of 141 clinically suspected pneumonia cases where more than 94 per cent of the confirmed cases were in the age group 50 years and above.<sup>iii</sup>

Pneumonia derives from Pneumococcal Disease which is a complex group of illnesses caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.<sup>iv</sup> This bacterium causes invasive infections which include bacteraemia/sepsis (bacterial infections of the blood), meningitis (inflammation of the membrane surrounding the spinal cord or brain), pneumonia (lung inflammation) and otitis media (media ear infection). World Health Organization (WHO) data published in April 2011, influenza and pneumonia deaths in Malaysia reached 9,417 or 9.20% of total deaths – influenza and pneumonia being the number three killer behind coronary heart disease and stroke.<sup>v</sup>

Immunization vaccines continue to be an urgent concern during the Hajj season – steps have to be taken to ensure that pilgrims are protecting themselves against the infectious diseases during their pilgrimage and do not bring back unwanted diseases upon their return to Malaysia. The exposure to various infectious diseases during Hajj create the necessity to heed the advice provided by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices who recommend the 13-valent Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine for pilgrims aged over 50 years of age and for younger pilgrims with comorbidities to protect themselves against pneumonia.<sup>viviviii</sup>

Dato' Dr. Hj Abdul Razak Muttalif, Head of Medical Advisory Board for the pilgrims performing Hajj, State and National level and the Director of the Institute of Respiratory Medicine Kuala Lumpur said “The Hajj attracts millions of people from different parts of the world who congregate in a limited area for an amount of time, in which provides the ideal environment to lead the widespread of infectious diseases and epidemics from one person to another. Therefore it is really important for pilgrims to understand the importance of vaccinating themselves against these diseases. In my experience as a health advisor for hajj pilgrims, I see many cases of respiratory disease and pneumonia during the Hajj.”

Additionally, in the recognition of the serious consequences of pneumococcal disease – a devastating disease which often leads to death and disabilities - various initiatives and efforts have been undertaken over the past few years to raise awareness of the disease and to highlight the importance of its prevention amongst Malaysian.

The upcoming Hajj and Umrah season foresees the importance for pilgrims to visit their health care providers and enquire on the various protection options available for them against infectious diseases. It is important to note that sanitation interventions such as hygiene, wearing a face mask, cough etiquette, social distancing, and contact avoidance can be effective at mitigating respiratory illness among Hajj pilgrims. Essentially, pilgrims should know that prevention is better than cure.

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from "Saudi Arabia: Hajj Pilgrimage".

Available at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2014/chapter-4-select-destinations/saudi-arabia-hajj-pilgrimage>. Accessed on: 23 June 2014

<sup>ii</sup> Al-Ghamdi SM, Akbar HO, Qari YA, Fathaldin OA, Al-Rashed RS. Pattern of admission to hospitals during muslim pilgrimage (Hajj) Saudi Med J. 2003;24:1073–6.

<sup>iii</sup> Asghar AH, Ashshi AM, Azhar EI, Bukhari SZ, Zafar TA, Momenah AM. Profile of bacterial pneumonia during Hajj. Indian J Med Res 2011;133:510–3.

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Invasive pneumococcal disease in children 5 years after conjugate vaccine introduction-eight states, 1998-2005. *Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2008;57:144-148.

<sup>v</sup> World Health Organization. 2004 Global Immunization Data. 2004.1-3.

<sup>vi</sup> Adapted from "Use of 13-Valent Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine and 23-Valent Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine for Adults with Immunocompromising Conditions: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)". Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6140a4.htm>. Accessed on: 30 June 2014.

<sup>vii</sup> Adapted from "Vaccination during Hajj, Umrah: Pfizer launches awareness campaign on pneumonia". Available at: <http://www.brecorder.com/business-a-economy/189:pakistan/1242773:vaccination-during-hajj-umrah-pfizer-launches-awareness-campaign-on-pneumonia/?date=2012-09-28>. Accessed on: 30 June 2014.

<sup>viii</sup> Adapted from "The potential for pneumococcal vaccination in Hajj pilgrims: Expert opinion". Available on: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23810307>. Accessed on: 30 June 2014.