

Does Arbaeen event is taking its place in global mass gathering programs?

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LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor

The Arbaeen pilgrimage is one of the biggest pilgrimages in the world. Its size is twice as the size of hajj pilgrimage in Mecca. Arbaeen visitors are estimated at 15–17 millions, in which 2–3 million of them are non-Iraqis migrated from 22 nations and 5 continents. This event takes almost 10 days to travel on feet from different Iraqi provinces to Kerbala with the distance from minimum 50 to maximum 300 miles.¹

There are many problems that may threaten the national and global health due to many communicable and infectious diseases happened during this pilgrimage. The first noted infectious diseases are food-borne illness and dermatological diseases due to sharing rest places (population rest stations), such as gal, gastrointestinal disease, and the most common is respiratory infections like influenza.²

The number of visitors increasing each year, long distance of the pilgrim, low sanitation, and the weakness of Iraqi health care system worsen the problem.^{3,4}

The Iraqi ministry of health in collaboration with Iraqi Red Crescent, health care NGOs, and health professions as volunteers provide primary health care and treatments by placing health stations and mobile hospitals on the visitors' way, but these stations do not cover the whole needs.

This event may lead to epidemics if not well organized and supported by WHO and another global health organizations in addition to ministries of health of visitors' countries through providing obvious plans and health programs. As well as, by training and educating people about hygiene especially those who provide food and rest places for visitors. Although things mentioned above as preventive methods are important, the most critical point is what can be done through media by increasing the awareness about these disease using native languages of the visitors⁵.

conflicts of Interest

Authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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