



Raising meningitis awareness in Pakistan for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims

Helping Hands Foundation (HHF)'s 2025 World Meningitis Day Advocacy Fund project aimed to spread life-saving education and promote vaccination to the general public. One focus of the project was outreach to those planning to take the Hajj or Umrah pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, a group at particular risk, as there have been recent meningitis outbreaks associated with the pilgrimage.

The project

The campaign combined school engagement, household sessions and community gatherings. Health workers delivered interactive sessions focused on improving general awareness of meningitis symptoms, early action, prevention and the importance of vaccination. They also distributed brochures with QR codes linking to a dedicated awareness website. Branded merchandise and banners reinforced trust and visibility.

When floods disrupted planned outreach, HHF adapted quickly, integrating awareness activities into relief camps to ensure vulnerable families were not left behind.

A public awareness walk, a symbolic lighting event and a newspaper article in [Business News](#) (Lahore, Multan & Karachi) amplified visibility across Multan in the Punjab, the most populous and second largest province in Pakistan.

Organisation

Helping Hands Foundation (HHF)

Background

Not-for-profit organisation dedicated to providing sustainable healthcare, education and community empowerment programs

Location

Pakistan



Pilgrim outreach

Millions of Muslims travel to Saudi Arabia every year as a pilgrimage. Some perform Hajj, a religious obligation that happens at the same time every year. Some perform Umrah, an elective act of worship that can be taken at any time. Both pilgrimages involve

mass gatherings and other risk factors that increase transmission risk. MenACWY vaccination is compulsory for pilgrims on Hajj, but it's possible to perform Umrah without having had the vaccine – even though this is not officially recommended.

Recent years have seen renewed meningococcal meningitis outbreaks resulting from Umrah pilgrimages, and the Saudi Health Authority estimated in March 2025 that only 54% of Umrah pilgrims were vaccinated.

HHF therefore included a dedicated project “stream” for those planning to travel for Hajj or Umrah. This group were briefed on crowd-related risks and given educational materials before travel. HHF emphasised the importance of meningococcal vaccination, not just as a requirement for Hajj, but as a benefit that protects both travellers and their families upon return.

HHF's worked closely with local community and religious leaders, who are trusted messengers within their communities, boosting acceptance of the campaign messaging.

Impact and outcomes

The campaign strengthened understanding of meningitis symptoms and the importance of prevention among schoolchildren, households and pilgrim groups. HHF used quizzes and surveys to compare knowledge before and after the sessions, seeing an improved result. They increased meningitis visibility and expanded digital access via QR-linked pamphlets directing people to [the awareness website](#).

More than 11,000 people were reached, including 450 pilgrims, 500 individuals in flood camps, 200 families and over 250 students. Over 1,000 brochures and pamphlets were distributed and early website traffic exceeded 900 visits by November. The awareness walk attracted over 150 participants and the newspaper article reached an estimated 8,000 readers.

Challenges and lessons

Seasonal floods disrupted outreach, vaccine hesitancy slowed engagement and limited digital literacy reduced QR code and digital resource use. The team



responded by relocating sessions to relief camps, engaging religious leaders and influencers to address misconceptions and providing on-site demonstrations for QR codes.

Lessons learned include starting digital engagement earlier, strengthening collaboration with health centres for vaccine referrals and allocating more time for pilgrim-focused outreach.

Looking ahead

Helping Hands Foundation plans to maintain and update the awareness website, organise quarterly community sessions with those reached and expand pilgrim education. Future activities will include new educational materials, short video explainers in local languages, Urdu and Saraiki, and annual World Meningitis Day events in schools and community hubs.

Further resources

 [HHF website](#)

 [Facebook page](#)

Contacts

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“Even a small grant can create significant impact when used strategically. The World Meningitis Day Advocacy Fund helped us reach schools, vulnerable households, pilgrims and flood-affected communities. If you have a meaningful idea, apply and turn it into measurable change.”

Dr. Abdul Mannan Mustafa, project lead

