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Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad speaking at the launch of the Haj and Umrah Immunisation Campaign in Putrajaya yesterday. PIC BY AHMAD IRHAM MOHD NOOR

HAJ AND UMRAH

PILGRIMS URGED TO GET 2 MORE VACCINES

Getting flu, pneumococcal shots will prevent health complications, says Health Ministry

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THE Health Ministry wants haj and umrah pilgrims to consider taking the pneumococcal and influenza vaccines before leaving for the holy land.

Its minister, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, said it was compulsory for pilgrims to take the meningococcal vaccine, but they should also get the pneumococcal and influenza vaccines as well due to the impact of the diseases on one's health.

He said pilgrims could get these vaccines from private clin-

ics and hospitals.

Dr Dzulkefly said influenza could cause death or serious complications, including sinus and ear infections, lung, heart, brain and muscle inflammation, and multiple organ failure.

"For pneumococcal, death can occur due to inflammation to the brain and spinal cord, pneumonia and blood infection.

"When taking the vaccines, it will not only protect one's health, but can prevent productivity loss and reduce government expenditure for health treatment, which can be quite costly," he said after the launch of the Haj and Umrah Immunisation Campaign here yesterday.

He said by taking care of one's health, it would make it easy for them to perform haj and umrah.

Dr Dzulkefly also said when one was infected by meningococcal and pneumococcal diseases and influenza in the Holy Land, the person was at risk of spreading the diseases to their family members who have weak immune sys-

tem, such as babies and children.

Since 2002, he said the government had approved allocation for the Health Ministry to purchase meningococcal vaccines for Malaysian pilgrims.

Asked if the government would consider making it compulsory for Malaysian pilgrims to take the pneumococcal and influenza vaccines, Dr Dzulkefly said it would involve more cost.

"This is related to opportunity cost. We have to look at the allocation we have. If we are (financially) able, of course we would enforce it (making it compulsory)," he said.

Health deputy director-general Datuk Dr Chong Chee Keong later said the ministry was working with the National Disaster Management Agency to prepare for the monsoon season to ensure there would be no healthcare disruption at inundated areas.

He said those who needed to take their medication on a daily basis should get a one- or two-month supply in advance.