

Banjul, Gambia, October 4 (Infosplusgabon) - The Gambian Ministry of Health on Sunday issued a statement warning people to stay away from the Maggal in Touba, Senegal, on Tuesday amid coronavirus.

Hordes of pilgrims in Senegal have begun to converge on the holy city of Touba, ahead of a giant traditional celebration on Tuesday, known as the Grand Magal, despite the threat of coronavirus.

The religious festival of the Mouride brotherhood, a powerful Sufi Muslim order, on that day celebrates the date French colonial authorities exiled its leader, Sheikh Amadou Bamba, known as Serigne Touba.

It is one of the most important dates on the Muslim religious calendar in Senegal, and it usually attracts hundreds of thousands of worshippers from across the West African country.

But this year's Magal marks the first mass festival of its kind in Senegal since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, raising fears of an easy spread.

“The public, especially those planning to attend the Grand Magal, are hereby urged to adhere to the guidelines and quarantine protocols governing isolation and testing.

“All are reminded that COVID-19 remains one of the most frequent cases of consultations at health facilities across our sub region. It is recommended that individuals at high risk for COVID-19 either due to their age or pre-existing medical conditions, like diabetes, hypertension and respiratory problems, refrain from public gatherings,” the health ministry warned.

The statement said that the Ministry of Health is discouraging intending travellers from attending the “Maggal” as Senegal continues to battle COVID-19.

However, the government of the Gambia stressed that those who defy this advisory shall provide respective negative PCR test results on COVID-19 within 72 hours upon their return before they are allowed re-entry into the country.

“Those who fail to provide negative PCR tests at the border entry points shall undergo mandatory quarantine at their own cost. The quarantine period, to be at government recognized facilities only, could be up to three days and may cost some D6,900 (about US\$140) or even more, depending on duration and individual circumstances.

The statement reminds citizens and residents that the Public Health Emergency Act (Dangerous Infectious Diseases) Protection Regulations, 2020 empowers the Minister of Health or Officers acting under its authority to institute strict measures as to when and where necessary.

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