

## Communication from Public

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# Hookahs: Not a Safe Alternative to Cigarettes

## What is Hookah?

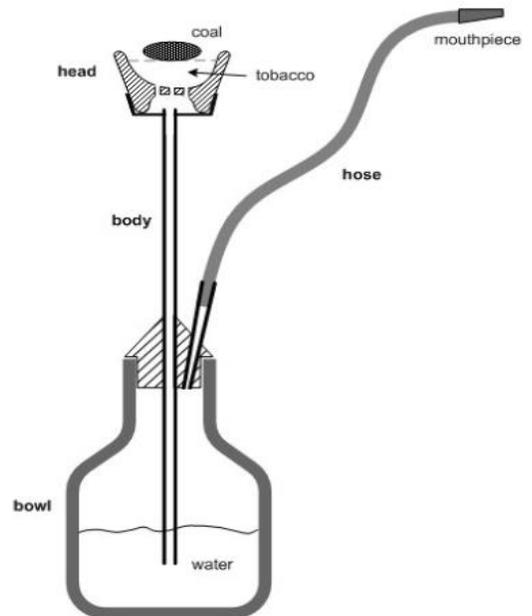
Hookah is a combustible tobacco product that has gained popularity among youth and young adults in the U.S. in recent years. Despite common misconceptions, hookah is not a safe alternative to cigarettes and other combustible tobacco products.

- Hookah or water pipe smoking involves burning tobacco, passing it through a water-filled bowl and inhaling the smoke through a long hose.
- Water pipes are known by a variety of other names, including: shisha, boory, goza, narghile, nargile, arghile, and hubble bubble.
- Increasingly, the most common form of tobacco smoked in a water pipe is called shisha or Maassel, which are sweetened with such flavors as apple, mint, cherry, or cappuccino.

## Who Uses Hookah?

- Water pipes are most common in areas of China, India, Pakistan, and the Eastern Mediterranean Region. However, in the last several years, hookah has been gaining in popularity in the United States, as well, particularly among college students<sup>i ii iii</sup> and young adults.<sup>iv v vi</sup>
- Hookah smoking typically takes place in groups. Hookah bars have been opening with increasing frequency across the United States, particularly in college towns and urban areas. In 2008 there were 470 hookah bars listed on the U.S. hookah bar directory,<sup>vii</sup> with an average growth rate of 5 hookah bars per month. Many hookah bars were not included in the directory, indicating that the number of hookah bars today is likely higher.<sup>viii</sup> More than one in five high school students (20.9%) in one study first learned about hookah by seeing a hookah bar in their community.<sup>ix</sup>
- Many hookah smokers have also tried or currently use cigarettes or other tobacco products.<sup>x xi xii xiii xiv</sup>
- The annual National Youth Tobacco Survey found that current hookah smoking increased in both middle and high school students until 2014, when it started to decline. In 2016, almost one million middle and high school students reported current hookah smoking.<sup>xv</sup> The CDC notes that the increases in hookah smoking seen among high school students may be a result of their marketing, availability, visibility, and the perception that they may be safer than cigarettes.<sup>xvi</sup>
- In 2014, an estimated 1.02 million middle and high school kids reported smoking flavored hookah. Among current hookah smokers, 60.6 percent reported using a flavored product.<sup>xvii</sup>

Hookah has been gaining in popularity in the United States, particularly among college students and young adults.



WHO (2005). *TobReg Advisory Note. Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking: Health Effects, Research Needs and Recommended Actions by Regulators*. WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation, 2005.

## What are the Health Effects of Exposure to Hookah Smoke?

- **Many hookah smokers incorrectly believe that it is less harmful or addictive than cigarette smoking.**<sup>xviii xix xx xxi</sup> Smoking water pipes, as well as breathing secondhand smoke from water pipes, is at least as harmful as exposure to cigarette smoke.<sup>xxii</sup>
- **Water pipe smoke, like cigarette smoke, contains significant amounts of cancer-causing ingredients, such as arsenic, cobalt, chromium, lead, and carbon monoxide.**<sup>xxiii xxiv xxv</sup> In addition, smoke from a water pipe contains carbon monoxide (CO) in amounts equal to or greater than smoke from cigarettes.<sup>xxvi xxvii xxviii xxix xxx</sup> A review and meta-analysis of existing research found that water pipe smoking has the same negative effect on lung function as cigarette smoking.<sup>xxxi</sup>
- **Water pipe smokers can be exposed to sufficient doses of nicotine to lead to addiction.**<sup>xxxii xxxiii</sup> A meta-analysis of four studies assessing biomarkers of exposure to nicotine and tobacco smoke among hookah smokers found that using a water pipe was equivalent to smoking two to 10 cigarettes per day.<sup>xxxiv xxxv</sup> Water pipe smoke produces similarly increased blood nicotine levels and increases in heart rate as cigarette use.<sup>xxxvi xxxvii</sup>
- **Smokers of water pipes may be exposed to even more smoke than cigarette smokers**<sup>xxxviii</sup> because water pipe smoking sessions last longer. One study found that during a typical water pipe smoking session, a user may inhale 90,000 milliliters of smoke compared with 500-600 milliliters of smoke during a cigarette smoking session.<sup>xxxix</sup> A World Health Organization report found that in a typical one-hour smoking session, users may inhale 100-200 times the amount of smoke as from a single cigarette.<sup>xl</sup> Another study found that during a typical one-hour water pipe use session a water pipe smoker likely generates ambient carcinogens and toxicants equivalent to that of 2-10 cigarette smokers.<sup>xli</sup>
- **Unlike cigarettes, water pipe smoke may also contain charcoal or wood cinder combustion products** from the heat source used to burn the tobacco, increasing the cancer- and heart-disease causing agents in the smoke.<sup>xlii</sup>
- **Water pipe smoke is associated with increased risk of disease** including cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and adverse effects during pregnancy.<sup>xliii</sup> In addition, the sharing of a water pipe mouthpiece increases the user's risk for communicable diseases.
- **A 2005 World Health Organization (WHO) advisory on water pipe tobacco smoking** addresses the health effects of water pipe smoking and makes several key recommendations related to regulating hookah in a similar manner as other tobacco products.<sup>xliiv</sup> This advisory remains in effect.

Smoking water pipes, as well as breathing secondhand smoke from water pipes, is at least as harmful as exposure to cigarette smoke.

## ACS CAN's Position

**ACS CAN supports the regulation of all tobacco products and the passage of strong smoke-free laws to protect people from the harms of secondhand smoke from all tobacco products.** Hookah bars should not be exempt from smoke-free laws that prohibit smoking in public places, including workplaces, restaurants, and bars. **ACS CAN also supports other policies focused on decreasing the use of hookah and other tobacco products. Specifically:**

- Hookah tobacco should be taxed at an equivalent rate to cigarettes and other tobacco products, using a price-based approach with a minimum tax;
- Sales of hookah tobacco should be prohibited to minors under age 21;
- Water pipe and hookah tobacco retailers and bars should be subject to the same licensing requirements as retailers of other tobacco products in the jurisdiction;
- Flavored hookah tobacco should be prohibited; and
- Additional questions about hookah use should be included on national and state-based surveys, particularly those targeting youth and young adults, to obtain information about the prevalence and patterns of hookah use that can be used to improve tobacco prevention and cessation.

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