



Waterpipe (Hookah) Factsheet

Evidence shows that waterpipe (hookah) smoking is just as risky as smoking cigarettes. The World Health Organization (WHO) issued an advisory on waterpipe tobacco smoking in 2005 addressing the health effects of waterpipe smoking and recommended the following regulatory actions:¹

- Waterpipes and their tobacco should be regulated in the same way as cigarettes and other tobacco products.
- Waterpipes should be prohibited in public places in the same manner as cigarette and other tobacco smoking.
- Waterpipes should be included in comprehensive tobacco control plans to address prevention and cessation.

Smoking waterpipes as well as breathing secondhand smoke from waterpipes can be presumed to have similar effects as exposure to cigarette smoke.²

- **Just like cigarettes, waterpipe smoke:**³
 - Contains carbon monoxide (CO) in amounts equal to or greater than that from cigarettes. CO replaces oxygen on red blood cells, making it harder for the body to deliver oxygen to vital organs.
 - Contains significant amounts of nicotine, arsenic, cobalt, chromium, and lead, substances known to cause cancer.
 - Produces similarly increased blood nicotine levels and increases in heart rate as cigarette use.
- **Unlike cigarettes, waterpipe smoke may also contain charcoal or wood cinder combustion products** from the heat source used to burn the tobacco, increasing the cancer-causing agents in the smoke.⁴
- **Waterpipe smoke is associated with increased risk of disease including** cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and adverse effects during pregnancy.⁵

¹ WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation. Advisory note: Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking: Health Effects, Research Needs and Recommended Actions by Regulators. World Health Organization, 2005. Accessed on December 6, 2005 at

http://www.who.int/tobacco/global_interaction/tobreg/Waterpipe%20recommendation_Final.pdf. (WHO, 2005)

² Maziak, W, Ward, KD, Afifi Soweid, RA, Eissenberg, T. (2004). Tobacco smoking using a waterpipe: a re-emerging strain in a global epidemic. *Tobacco Control*, 13, 327-333.

³ Ibid

⁴ WHO, 2005.

⁵ Ibid

Of concern, smokers of waterpipes may be exposed to even more smoke than cigarette smokers because waterpipe smoking sessions last from 20-80 minutes during which a smoker may inhale as much smoke as that from 100 or more cigarettes.⁶

Background on waterpipes or hookahs

- Hookahs are one name for waterpipes, which is a method of smoking tobacco. Other names include: shisha, boory, goza, narghile, nargile, arghile, and hubble bubble.
- The most common form of tobacco smoked in a waterpipe is called Maassel, which is sweetened and flavored in such flavors as apple, mint, cappuccino, etc.
- Waterpipes are most common in areas of China, India, Pakistan, and the Eastern Mediterranean Region. However, hookah bars exist in the United States as well.⁷

In conclusion, the available evidence suggests that smoking waterpipes and being exposed to second-hand smoke from waterpipes are associated with a high degree of health risk, including cancer risk. The WHO has recognized the importance of including waterpipes in all tobacco regulation. The American Cancer Society supports regulation of all tobacco products and passage of strong smoke-free laws to protect people from the harms of secondhand smoke from all tobacco products.

⁶ WHO, 2005.

⁷ "Local Hookah Bars," Tipsheet. The Washington Post, 25 September 2005.