Hookah Smoking

Hookah is a water pipe used to smoke tobacco, marijuana and other substances. Smoke is created through indirect charcoal heat, filtered through water, and drawn through a rubber hose to a mouthpiece. It is often smoked in group settings using the same mouthpiece.\(^1\) Shisha, a mixture of tobacco and a sweetener (such as molasses) is a commonly-used product for hookah in the U.S. and is often flavored to taste like fruit or candy.

**Not a safe alternative to cigarettes**
- Many hookah smokers believe that smoking hookah is less harmful than smoking cigarettes.\(^2\) However, smoking tobacco from a hookah carries many of the same or greater health risks as smoking cigarettes.\(^1,5\)
- Water pipe smoking delivers nicotine, which is addicting, and is at least as toxic as cigarette smoke.\(^3\)
- Due to the frequency of puffing, depth of inhalation, and length of the smoking session, hookah smokers may absorb higher concentrations of the toxins found in cigarette smoke.\(^1,5\)
- A typical 1-hour-long hookah smoking session involves inhaling over 100 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single cigarette.\(^4\)
- Hookah smokers may be at risk for some of the same diseases as cigarette smokers, such as oral lung, stomach and esophageal cancer, reduced lung function and decreased fertility.\(^5,6\)

**High use among youth and young adults**
- In King County, 14% of 12th graders reported using hookah within the last 30 days.\(^7\)
- Almost a quarter of U.S. young adults (aged 18-24) had used hookah to smoke flavored tobacco.\(^8\)

**Health effects of hookah smoking and secondhand smoke**
- The charcoal used to heat tobacco in the hookah increases the health risks by producing high levels of carbon monoxide, metals, and cancer-causing chemicals.\(^1,6\)
- Hookah tobacco and smoke contain numerous toxic substances known to cause lung, bladder, oral cancers, and heart disease.\(^1,6\)
- Secondhand smoke from hookahs poses a serious risk, particularly because it contains smoke not only from the tobacco but also from the heat source (e.g., charcoal) used in the hookah.\(^1,6\)
- Babies born to women who smoked one or more water pipes a day during pregnancy have lower birth weights than babies born to nonsmokers and are at an increased risk for respiratory diseases.\(^9\)
- Infectious diseases may be transmitted between smokers due to sharing a hookah.\(^5\)

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**New forms of hookah**
In recent years, new forms of hookah smoking have been introduced.

- Studies of tobacco-based shisha and "herbal" shisha show that smoke from both preparations contains carbon monoxide and other toxic agents known to increase the risks for smoking-related cancers, heart disease, and lung disease.\(^{13,10}\)
- Electronic hookah, such as steam stones and hookah pens, are battery powered and turn liquid containing nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals into a vapor, which is inhaled.\(^{11}\) Products that contain nicotine are addictive, yet very little information is currently available on the health risks of the other flavorings and chemicals.
- For more information about electronic devices (e-cigarettes, vaping devices) see our [E-cigarette and vapor product page](#).

**Regulations**
Hookah smoking is regulated the same way cigarette smoking is in Washington. [State law and local King County Board of Health Code](#) prohibit smoking (including hookah smoking) from all public places and places of employment. There are no exemptions for traditional hookah lounges.

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7. 2014 Washington Healthy Youth Survey

8. Truth Initiative, "Correlates of Hookah Use and Predictors of Hookah Trial in U.S. Young Adults" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*


11. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Electronic Cigarettes (e-Cigarettes) [last updated 2013 April 25; accessed 2015 Sep 14].