What is **Hookah**?

A hookah is a single or multi-stemmed instrument used to smoke tobacco. Shisha is the type of tobacco smoked in a hookah. It is a very moist and sticky tobacco that is often soaked in honey or molasses, fruit, or other flavored components.¹ Shisha provides a pleasant aroma when heated slowly with burning charcoal and comes in a variety of flavors including apple, strawberry, rose, mango, cappuccino, banana, peach, lemon, orange, mint, and licorice.²

The shisha is heated in the bowl at the top of the hookah and the smoke is filtered through the water in the base of the hookah, providing a cooling effect on the smoke that is inhaled.¹ The user inhales the water filtered smoke through a tube and mouthpiece.³ A typical session lasts from 45-60 minutes, but can last for several hours.²

Alternate names for hookahs include: waterpipe, goza, hubble-bubble, borry, and narghile.¹

Hookah use dates back at least 500 years, believed to have originated in India, and is a cultural tradition across the Middle East, Persia, Afghanistan, Turkey and parts Africa.¹

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**THE HOOKAH BOOM**

Prevalence data on hookah use in the U.S. is limited, but there is a clear indication of the growing popularity of hookah use among youth and young adults. In 2011, over 18% of 12th graders reported using hookah in the past year.⁴ According to a June 2012 study, one third of college students reported having smoked hookah.⁵

The rise in hookah smoking among young people may be related to several factors:⁶

- Many young people mistakenly believe that hookah smoke has less nicotine and is less toxic because the smoke is filtered through water.
- Shisha tobacco is available in a variety of enticing flavors.
- Hookah smoking is a social activity, and often advertised as exotic.
- Shisha tobacco is often cheaper to buy than cigarettes.
- Shisha tobacco can be sold online making access to this product easier for youth.
Hookah Lounges/Cafes

Hookah bars, lounges, and restaurants have become popular social gathering places for young smokers. Two-thirds of states have hookah bars and cafes, usually near large colleges and universities.⁷

Hookah bars attract young customers through advertising in college/university and local newspapers and on radio stations popular among young people. These establishments also appeal to college populations by emphasizing exotic aspects of Middle Eastern culture in their décor, furnishings, music, and displays of a variety of colorful, finely crafted hookahs.² Some lounges do not serve alcohol, and can be particularly appealing to youth under the age of 21.

Marketing

Many businesses have developed websites to advertise and sell hookah products. Often lounges focus on flavorings, pleasure, relaxation, product quality, and social aspects.² Lounges capitalize on the exotic nature and cultural history of hookah, promoting a variety of products within those themes.² In the US, hookah use is often promoted as new, trendy, and a safe social activity for college students in particular.²

A recent study determined that of 144 hookah lounge websites sampled across the US only 4% included a tobacco-related warning on their website and information on age limits, health warnings, and involvement of tobacco in hookah smoking was limited.⁸
Myths & Truths about Hookah
(The Bacchus Network, Top Facts: Hookahs)¹

**MYTH:** Hookah smoke is filtered through water so it filters out any harmful ingredients.

**TRUTH:** Smoking tobacco through water does not filter out cancer-causing chemicals. Water-filtered smoke can damage the lungs and heart as much as cigarette smoke.

**MYTH:** Inhaling hookah smoke does not burn the lungs, so it is not unhealthy.

**TRUTH:** The hookah smoke does not burn the lungs when inhaled because is cooled through the water in the base of the hookah. Even though the smoke is cooled, it still contains carcinogens and it is still unhealthy.

**MYTH:** Smoking hookahs are healthier than smoking cigarettes.

**TRUTH:** Hookah smoke is just as dangerous as cigarette smoke. Hookahs generate smoke in different ways: cigarette smoke is generated by burning tobacco, while hookah smoke is produced by heating tobacco in a bowl using charcoal. The end product is the same—smoke, containing carcinogens.

**MYTH:** Smoking a hookah is not as addictive as smoking a cigarette because there is no nicotine.

**TRUTH:** Just like regular tobacco, shisha contains nicotine. In fact, in a 60-minute hookah session, smokers are exposed to 100 to 200 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single cigarette.

**MYTH:** Herbal shisha is healthier than regular shisha.

**TRUTH:** Just like smoking herbal or “natural” cigarettes, herbal shisha exposes the smoker to tar and carcinogens.

**MYTH:** Shisha tobacco contains fruit, so is healthier than regular tobacco.

**TRUTH:** Tobacco is tobacco, no matter how you look at it. Shisha is often soaked in molasses or honey and mixed with fruit, but it still contains cancer-causing chemicals and nicotine.
Health Risks of Hookah

Research studies have provided ample evidence that hookah smoking is not a safe alternative to cigarette smoking.

- Health risks of smoking hookahs include lung, mouth, throat, stomach and other cancers; heart disease; lung damage; and dental disease.²

- Hookah smoke has been found to contain high concentrations of carbon monoxide, nicotine, tar, and heavy metals.¹ Very little nicotine is filtered out of hookah smoke. A study found that a less than 5% decrease in nicotine was observed.⁹

- Heat sources like charcoal or wood cinders may increase health risks because they produce carbon monoxide, metals, and cancer causing chemicals in addition to the tobacco.²

- Smoking hookah requires taking longer and harder drags, increasing levels of inhaled nicotine and cancer causing chemicals in the lungs.¹

- The longer the hookah session, the more nicotine and toxins one takes in.

- A 45 to 60 minute hookah session exposes the smoker to approximately the same amount of tar and nicotine as one pack of cigarettes.¹

- Sharing mouthpieces without washing them can increase risk of spreading of colds, flu, and communicable infections like oral herpes and mononucleousis.¹

- Hookahs give off very high levels of secondhand smoke exposing even non-smokers to damaging levels of toxic substances in hookah smoke.²

- A recent study suggests that 18-24 year olds who use other substances, such as cigarettes, marijuana, alcohol, or other illicit drugs smoke hookah at a higher rate.⁹

- Hookah smoke has the same addictive properties as cigarettes, which can lead a hookah user to begin using cigarettes, or becoming a dual user of hookah and cigarettes.¹¹
**Chemical composition of Hookah smoke vs cigarette smoke**

**TABLE A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chemical</th>
<th>Yield from 1 gm hookah tobacco</th>
<th>Yield from cigarette smoke, 1 gm tobacco</th>
<th>Multiple of average cigarette smoke value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Tar,” mg</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>Range: 1-27 Average: 11.2</td>
<td>100-fold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicotine, mg</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>Range: 0.1-2 Average: 0.77</td>
<td>4-fold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbon monoxide CO,mg</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>Range: 1-22 Average: 12.6</td>
<td>11-fold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAH Phenanthrene, µg (co-carcinogen)</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.2-0.4</td>
<td>2.5-fold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluranthracene, µg (co-carcinogen)</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>0.009-0.099</td>
<td>4-fold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysene, µg (tumor initiator)</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.004-0.041</td>
<td>5-fold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Can County Governments Regulate Hookah in Maryland?

Fact: Maryland’s Clean Indoor Air Act (2007) prohibits smoking in bars, restaurants and other indoor areas open to the public.

Question: If smoking is prohibited in bars and restaurants, why is smoking allowed inside hookah bars?

Answer: The Clean Indoor Air Act has an exemption (§ 24-505) created for establishments whose “primary activity is the retail sale of tobacco-containing products and accessories,” and the “sale of other products is incidental.” Hookah bars claim to operate under this exemption.

Question: If I believe that a hookah bar is “primarily” selling food and drinks rather than hookah, or that food and drinks are more than “incidental” to hookah sales, what should I do?

Answer: You can 1) report the matter to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, or 2) report to your local health department. The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 10.19.04.07-10) grants local health officers the authority to investigate potential CIA violations, issue citations and levy penalties.

Fact: Maryland’s Clean Indoor Air Act § 24-510 preserves the power of county and municipal governments to enact and enforce more stringent measures to reduce involuntary exposure to environmental tobacco smoke.

Question: What more can county governments do to regulate hookah?

Answer: State law grants “police power,” to the County Council in home rule counties. This gives counties the authority to adopt ordinances in the interest of “maintaining the peace, good government, health and welfare of the county.” Md. Code Ann., Art 25A, §5(s). The sale or use of shisha, the restriction or prohibition of hookah bars, and zoning of hookah bars and retailers may fall under this broad source of power.

Board of Health Authority: State law gives County Boards of Health the authority to “adopt and enforce rules and regulations on any nuisance or disease in the county.” Md. Code Ann. Health-Gen. 3-202(d). The use and sale of hookah is a cause of disease and a may be source of nuisance, giving the County Board of Board authority to adopt rules governing sanitation, health and safety of hookah establishments.

Health Officer’s nuisance abatement authority: State law grants local health officers the authority to abate nuisances, which include any condition dangerous to health or safety, including any condition “transmitted by…air currents” or “humans.” Md. Code Ann., §20-301(14). The use and sale of hookah is dangerous to health in a number of ways, so the Health Officer may act to abate the nuisance by restricting the use or sale of hookah, and sanitation and safety of hookah establishments.

For more information please contact the Legal Resource Center (410) 706-0842.
Resources

American Cancer Society, Hookah’s are trendy, but are they safe?: http://www.cancer.org/cancer/news/expertvoices/post/2012/05/29/hookahs-are-trendy-but-are-they-safe.aspx


The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet - Hookahs: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/tobacco_industry/hookahs/


References


11. American Cancer Society, Hookah’s are trendy, but are they safe?: http://www.cancer.org/cancer/news/expertvoices/post/2012/05/29/hookahs-are-trendy-but-are-they-safe.aspx