

What is smoked in a Hookah?

- Shisha is a combination of tobacco and a sweetener. It is often sold in a variety of flavors, including apple, banana, berry, cherry, chocolate and other flavors.¹
- *Ma'ssel*, for example, is a popular type of flavored tobacco mixture used to smoke hookah that contains compounds that are known to be toxic, carcinogenic, and hazardous. In comparison to smoking a single cigarette (unflavored tobacco), one hookah smoking session of this popular type of flavored tobacco releases greater amounts of toxic compounds, such as formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, acrolein, propionaldehyde, and methacrolein, into the smoke.²
- Cinders or charcoal are used to burn the tobacco in a hookah pipe that results in the release of high levels of potentially dangerous chemicals such as carbon monoxide and metals.¹

Health Effects of Hookah Smoking

- While many people may consider smoking hookahs less harmful than smoking cigarettes, it carries many of the same health risks. When compared to a single cigarette, hookah smoke is known to contain higher levels of arsenic, lead, and nickel; 36 times more tar; and 15 times more carbon monoxide.³
- A typical one hour hookah smoking session involves inhaling 100–200 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single cigarette.⁴
- The smoke from hookah contains many of the same toxins as cigarette smoke, such as carbon monoxide, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and nicotine. Hookah tobacco and hookah smoke contain numerous toxic substances known to cause clogged arteries and heart disease.³
- 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.
- Even after it has passed through water, the smoke produced by a hookah contains high levels of toxic compounds, including carbon monoxide, heavy metals, and cancer-causing chemicals.
- Hookah tobacco (shisha) and hookah smoke contain numerous toxic substances known to cause lung, bladder, and oral cancers. Irritation from exposure to tobacco juices increases the risk of developing oral cancers. The irritation by tobacco juice products is likely to be greater among hookah smokers than among pipe or cigar smokers because hookah smoking is typically practiced (with or without inhalation) more often and for longer periods of time.³
- Infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and hepatitis may be transmitted by sharing a hookah.⁵

¹ American Lung Association Tobacco Policy Trend Alert, “An Emerging Deadly Trend: Waterpipe Tobacco Use”, February 2007

² Smokefree.gov, Answers About Hookah Smoking

³ The Bacchus Network, Top Facts: Hookahs, May 2007 .

⁴ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Hookah Fact Sheet

⁵ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative, TobReg Advisory Note, “Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking: Health Effects, Research Needs and Recommended Actions by Regulators, 2005.

Hookah and Secondhand Smoke

- Secondhand smoke from hookah tobacco poses a serious risk for nonsmokers, particularly because its smoke comes not only from the combustion of tobacco, but also from the heat source (e.g., charcoal) used to keep the hookah tobacco lit.³

Hookah and Young Adults

- Researchers have found that the odds were two times greater that teens who smoked hookahs would also be cigarette smokers. The odds of a teen experimenting with cigarettes were more than eight times greater if they had “ever smoked” a waterpipe.¹
- Hookah cafes and lounges often target 18-24 year olds. They are the fastest-growing population of hookah users, especially in and around colleges and universities.¹
- An alarming number of teens and young adults have used hookahs. It is reported that approximately 17% of high school students and 22-44% of college students within the United States have used Hookahs in the last year.⁶

⁶ Surgeon General’s Report (High School Seniors- Johnson et al, 2011 and College Students- Primack et al, 2008; Dugas et al, 2010.)