

# Water Pipe Smoking

## Share the Facts



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

### What is water pipe smoking?

A water pipe is a smoking device with many names, most commonly known as “shisha”, “sheesha”, “hookah”, “nargile”, “harghila”, “hubble-bubble”, “goza” and “argileh”. Shisha or hookah also refers to the substance that is smoked in the pipe. *For the purpose of this fact sheet, the substance that is smoked in a water pipe will be referred to as “shisha”.*<sup>2</sup>

Shisha is a moist mixture made with molasses or honey, fruit, and flavourings such as apple, grape, lemon/lime and other flavours. Research suggests that the majority of shisha products are mixed with tobacco. In North America, the social nature of water pipe use is thought to contribute to the appeal for young adults.<sup>1,3-5</sup>

Globally, the highest rates of smoking water pipes occur in the African Region (primarily North Africa), the Eastern Mediterranean Region and the South-East Asia Region. Water pipe smoking is relatively new in North America, especially among post-secondary students and the young adult population.<sup>1</sup>

According to the 2012 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitory Survey, 9.8 per cent of Ontario residents aged 15 years and older reported ever using a water pipe.

### Why is water pipe smoking dangerous to your health and to others?

- **It can be addictive.** The majority of water pipe research to date is focused on shisha mixed with tobacco. These mixtures are known to contain nicotine at the same or greater levels as cigarettes which can lead to nicotine addiction. As a result, casual water pipe use may lead to more regular use over time.<sup>1,5-11</sup>
- **There are similar risks as cigarette smoking.** While there are differences between smoking cigarettes and smoking a water pipe such as the frequency of puffing and the depth of inhalation, the existing evidence suggests that the health risks from smoking a water pipe are similar to the health risks of cigarette smoking.<sup>1,3-11</sup>

- **Infections can be spread.** Another potential health effect is related to the social nature of water pipe use, as the hose/mouthpiece can be shared amongst users. Certain infections (for example, respiratory infections) could be spread through saliva. Therefore, sharing of a hose/mouthpiece may be associated with risks similar to that of sharing other items, such as cigarettes.
- **Second-hand smoke.** As with second-hand smoke from cigarettes, water pipe smoking of shisha mixed with tobacco creates large volumes of second hand smoke, which could represent a health risk to others in the area of the smoke.<sup>6-8,12-14</sup>
- **You may not know what you are smoking.** The exact amount of tobacco that is mixed with shisha is often not known due to a lack of, or poor, package labeling.

### The Smoke-Free Ontario Act and water pipe smoking

As of January 1, 2016 the sale and distribution of flavoured waterpipe tobacco is banned in Ontario.

Flavoured waterpipe tobacco refers to:

- One or more artificial or natural ingredients contained in any of the parts of the tobacco product,
- A part or an additive that gives it a smell or taste other than tobacco - either before or during the use of the tobacco product.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA) prohibits the smoking of tobacco or “lighted” tobacco in any enclosed public place or workplace. Food premises that allow patrons to use water pipes must only offer tobacco-free shisha product.

To report an infraction under the Smoke-free Ontario Act contact Region of Waterloo at (519) 575-4400 (TTY 519 575-4608)

[www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph](http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph)

## Water pipe parts



**Coal** – heats the shisha which begins to burn it

**Bowl** – holds the shisha

**Tray** – catches any ash that may fall

**Stem** – Smoke from the burning shisha travels down the stem

**Air valve** – brings air into the water pipe which pushes smoke through the water into the hose

**Vase** – filled with water which filters the smoke

**Hose** – attaches a mouthpiece to the water pipe

## References:

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<sup>11</sup> Raad, D., Gaddam, S., Schunemann, H.J., Irani, J., Abou Jaoude, P., Honeine, R., and Akl, E.A. (2011). Effects of waterpipe smoking on lung function: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Chest*, 139, 764-774.

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Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.

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## Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

Tabacco Information Line  
519-575-4400