



Waterpipe Smoking

What is waterpipe smoking?

Waterpipe is a tobacco-smoking device that originated from India and the Middle East.

The main components of waterpipe tobacco are tobacco bowl, water bowl and hose. It is connected with single or multi-hose for inhaling tobacco smoke which heated by lit charcoal.

Waterpipe tobacco comes in different flavours. The tobacco is heated to give off smoke which passes through a water bowl and is inhaled by the smoker through the hose of the waterpipe. This smoke not only contains the combustion products of tobacco, but also that of the charcoal or other heating substances.

Contrary to the belief of many waterpipe smokers, waterpipe smoking is not safer than smoking cigarettes. Even after the smoke has passed through water, it contains numerous toxicants including tar, carbon monoxide, heavy metals and cancer-causing chemicals.

Health hazards of waterpipe smoking

Smoke of tobacco contains numerous toxicants even after it passed through water. Due to the mode of smoking - including frequency of puffing, depth of inhalation, and length of the smoking session - waterpipe smokers may inhale more toxins than they would when smoking cigarettes. A typical 1-hour waterpipe smoking session exposes the user to 100-200 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single cigarette! It also results in a carbon monoxide level at least four to five times higher than the amount produced by one cigarette.

Waterpipe smokers are at risk for the same kind of diseases as are caused by cigarette smoking, including oral cancer, lung cancer, stomach cancer, cancer of the oesophagus, heart disease, reduced lung function and decreased fertility. Waterpipe smoking also delivers the addictive drug nicotine and causes dependence. Secondhand smoke from waterpipes poses a serious health hazard to non-smokers as well.

Charcoals or embers are commonly used to heat tobacco during waterpipe smoking. The combustion of them increases the health risks by producing high levels of carbon monoxide, heavy metals and hydrocarbons.

Risk of infectious disease transmission by sharing waterpipe apparatus

Waterpipe are commonly shared by waterpipe smokers. The parts and accessories of waterpipe (e.g. water bowl and hose) are difficult to be completely disinfected after each smoking session. The design of the apparatus and the manner of use also promote the growth and transmission of microorganisms. Research already showed that the use of waterpipe increases risk of infectious diseases such as Herpes Simplex virus, tuberculosis, and hepatitis C virus.

Prohibition of smoking in no smoking area

According to the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance, no person shall smoke or carry a lighted cigarette, cigar or pipe in statutory no smoking areas. Offenders will be subject to a fixed penalty of HK\$1,500. Anyone who smokes waterpipe in statutory no smoking areas will also be prosecuted.

All content and information contained in this publication are protected by copyright, of which the owner is the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office of Department of Health, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.