

Parents: The First Line of Defense

Hookah - also known as narghile, shisha, goza and hubbly bubbly - has quickly become a growing trend among teens in the United States. Hookah is a water pipe that originated in India and has become popular in many parts of the US and around the world. What most teens and parents do not know or understand, however, are the many health risks associated with smoking hookah.

There are actually quite a few dangerous misperceptions about hookah smoking. Many teens think that because smoking hookah is legal once they are 18, that it is not as dangerous as cigarette smoking. They also think that because hookah smoke passes through water, the chemicals and toxins are filtered out. This is not true. The nicotine content in hookah is equivalent to the amount in cigarettes, but because hookah users usually inhale more smoke than cigarette users and a normal hookah session lasts around an hour; hookah users are actually inhaling the nicotine and dangerous chemicals equivalent to that in 40 to 400 cigarettes (*Hookah Smoking*, 2007). There is also a greater risk of carbon monoxide poisoning with hookah use because charcoal is used to heat the tobacco. Hookah's fruity flavors, and the fun, social atmosphere associated with hookah bars and restaurants seem to add to its harmless image. Don't be fooled. Water pipe smoke is at least as harmful as smoking cigarettes; it contains similar carcinogens and far greater amounts of tar and heavy metals. One added danger of hookah smoking is that users often share the same mouthpiece, increasing the risk of spreading infectious diseases, such as colds and flu.

What parents might want to know is that a new research study has shown that teens who reported ever having smoked a water pipe were about eight times more likely to smoke cigarettes. Hookah bars and restaurants are becoming more popular as fun, safe, "hangout" spots for teens. However, many hookah bars and restaurants only request identification from the person who actually buys the tobacco, thus allowing underage teens to smoke. Even if your teen is just there to hangout with friends, hookah bars and lounges are filled with toxic second hand and third hand smoke. Second hand smoke from a hookah is even more harmful than that from a cigarette because it contains smoke from the tobacco, as well as smoke from the charcoal used to burn the tobacco. Third hand smoke, which is the left over tobacco smoke contamination that remains after second hand smoke clears, covers almost every surface in a hookah bar or restaurant (couches, tables, walls, etc.). Anyone who comes into contact with third hand smoke covered surfaces can ingest many harmful toxins.

Hookah bars, restaurants and lounges are a quickly growing trend throughout California. Parents can educate other parents and community members about the dangers of smoking hookah. Most importantly parents can talk to their own teens about the dangers of smoking hookah and encourage them to make healthy choices.

Because you care, protect your teens. Get involved and share your knowledge with them.

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