

February 22, 2011

To whom it may concern:

I wish to offer testimony on the health risks of Hookah smoking.

There are well documented health risks to smoking tobacco which are also germane to hookah smoking. Numerous publications have highlighted these hazards.

I am not an expert on the toxicity of tobacco per se. But as a board certified infectious diseases specialist practicing in the State of CT for over 34 years, I wish to address the potential communicable disease risks of hookah smoking. Unfortunately, there are no credible prospective studies on the infectious risks of hookah smoking.

There are documented risks to sharing mouthpieces; exposure to contaminated tubing; and inhaling water vapor or droplets that may be contaminated by respiratory secretions or environmental organisms. Common mouth pieces, and tubing directly contiguous to the mouth piece, can become colonized with a variety of dangerous germs. This is analogous to the risk involved in sharing other oral devices such as wind instruments, pipes, or glass blowing equipment. These have been well shown to transmit syphilis, herpes, and hepatitis.

Sharing intimate air supplies with other individuals (as in sharing the hookah internal environment), even if "filtered" through water, risks exposure to expired organisms. Spread of tuberculosis in this manner has been well documented. Other aerosolized organisms such as SARS and perhaps influenza, could be similarly spread. The water reservoir of the hookah is also an ideal environment for the growth of water-loving organisms such as Legionella (the cause of Legionnaire's Disease) which is found in many samples of tap water. Relevant literature shows that cool mist vaporizers and bubble humidifiers are similarly common sources of Legionella infection as well as other environmental bacteria such as Pseudomonas and Acinetobacter which cause pneumonia.

Disposable tubing and mouthpieces may decrease the risks of direct person-to-person disease transmission, but some risks will continue if simultaneous use of the hookah is permitted by more than one individual, or if the water is not changed and the hookah reservoir is not cleaned between users.

Sincerely

Michael Parry, M.D.
Director of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology
Stamford Hospital

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