

## What is Hookah? And Why is it Harmful to Health?

*This fact sheet is designed to introduce you to hookah smoking, its ill effects, and policy actions that can reduce its harm.*

### What is a hookah?

- A hookah is a waterpipe used for smoking tobacco.
- It is also known as ‘narghile,’ ‘argheela,’ ‘shisha,’ ‘goza,’ as well as many other names which vary by region.
- The hookah was invented in India but has many of its roots in the Middle East and North Africa where the practice of hookah smoking has been a common social activity for centuries.<sup>1</sup>
- Flavored tobacco is heated with a charcoal cake, moves through water at the base of the pipe, and is inhaled through a hose on the side of the hookah.



### What is the situation in the United States?



- Since the 1990s waterpipe smoking appears to be spreading among new populations such as college students and young persons in the United States.<sup>1</sup>
- Loopholes in the Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act have allowed for hookah bars to open across the state. From 2000 to 2006, 200 to 300 hookah bars have opened nationwide, according to Smokeshop Magazine, many near college campuses.<sup>2</sup>
- In some communities, hookah bars are combined with food and drink service, making them more appealing.
- Given the associated health risks of hookah, communities are taking action to remove the exemption in smoke-free laws that has allowed them to open.

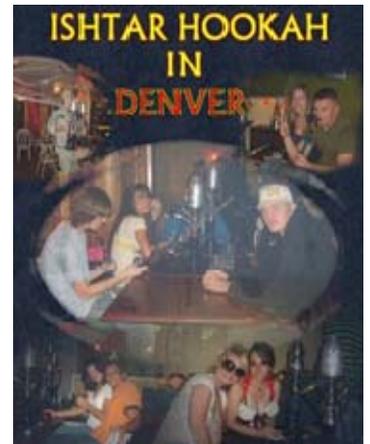
### Harms of Hookah<sup>1</sup>

- There is a common myth that smoking tobacco through a hookah filters many of the harmful toxins associated with smoking tobacco.
- Hookah tobacco contains the same cancer-causing chemicals found in other tobacco products; for instance a smoker might inhale the smoke-equivalent of 100 cigarettes during a single hookah smoking session.
- Because hookah smoking is a prolonged social activity, there is exposure to secondhand smoke from both the tobacco and the charcoal; this poses serious health risks (heart disease, asthma, respiratory disease, cancer, etc.) both to smokers and nonsmokers in the bar.

- Though many hookah smokers already smoke cigarettes, hookah smoking for some can lead to nicotine addiction and, in turn, use of other nicotine products.
- Sharing a hookah mouthpiece might contribute to the spread of colds, flu, and other infectious diseases.

## Jefferson County

- There are currently two known hookah bars operating in Unincorporated Jefferson County.
- Because there are few limits on tobacco-only establishments, it is possible that more hookah bars will open.
- Due to food service licensing policies, hookah bars and other tobacco businesses are not allowed to prepare and serve food or beverages to patrons in Jefferson County.
- Some hookah businesses have DJs, a “club” atmosphere, and host weekend parties and events to attract local youth.
- Arvada, Edgewater, and the City of Golden have ordinances which have removed the exemption for tobacco businesses. No hookah bars, smoking lounges or other smoking is allowed inside workplaces or businesses in these communities.



## Policy Actions

- Local public health and tobacco prevention coalitions can work to support strengthening smoke-free laws by removing smoke-free exemptions for tobacco businesses, such as hookah bars, and helping to educate others about the harms of hookah smoking and secondhand smoke.

In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following actions (abridged list)<sup>1</sup>:

- that hookah and its tobacco are subject to the same regulations as cigarettes and other tobacco products;
- that safe-alternative claims be prohibited (including labeling such as “contains 0mg tar”);
- that health professionals be educated and, in turn, educate the public about the risks and dangers of hookah smoking; and
- that hookahs be prohibited in public places consistent with bans on cigarettes and other forms of tobacco smoking.

## References

1. World Health Organization, WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation (TobReg), Advisory Note: *Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking: Health Effects, Research Needs and Recommended Actions by Regulators* (2005). Access at: [http://www.who.int/tobacco/global\\_interaction/tobreg/Waterpipe%20recommendation\\_Final.pdf](http://www.who.int/tobacco/global_interaction/tobreg/Waterpipe%20recommendation_Final.pdf)
2. Lewin, Tamar, *Collegians Smoking Hookahs ... Filled With Tobacco*, New York Times, April 19, 2006, access at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/19/education/19hookah.html>