

Editorial

Smoking Shisha or Cigarette – Dangerous for Human Health – Different Studies

Dr. Azhar Masud Bhatti

A. Director Health Services, EPI Punjab, Lahore

&
Editor in Chief

Smoking shisha: how bad is it for you?

Shisha, the origins of which are disputed (some say India, others Persia or Turkey) in a glass bottomed water pipe in which fruit-flavoured tobacco is covered with foil and roasted with charcoal. The tobacco smoke passes through a water chamber and is inhaled deeply and slowly; the fruit-flavoured tobacco tastes smooth and smells sweet, enthusiasts say, making it an enjoyable and unrushed experience.

Rezavi, a student from London, tried his first shisha when he was 16. He began smoking regularly five years ago and helped his father establish a shisha café. The café closed down after the smoking ban came into effect in 2007, but Rezavi still smokes six times a week, either at home or at one of his favourite shisha bars with friends. “It’s part of my routine. It’s just nice to have it bubbling in the background when I am studying.”

And he’s not alone, usually shared between friends Shisha is now associated with Middle Eastern café culture, but has become increasingly popular in the UK in recent years with cafes popping up in cities across the country. It’s a phenomenon that has worried Primary Care Trusts across the UK, which think that, unlike cigarette smokers, Shisha user are unaware of the health risks.

Earlier this year, Leicester Primary Care Trusts stop smoking service said it had seen an alarming rise in the number of teenagers in the city smoking Shisha. And this summer, Birmingham’s three Primary Care Trusts will launch a city wide tobacco control strategy which includes increasing the awareness of Shisha smoking. Meanwhile, the Niche Tobacco Advisory Group (NTAG) for North England recently introduced an educational campaign on Shisha smoking.

Dr. Khalid Anis, chairman of NTAG in Manchester, says “There’s a misconception that Shisha is not as bad for you as cigarettes, because the tobacco in flavoured and passes through water first. But the carcinogens and nicotine are still there. So a regular Shisha smoker can expect to be at risk to the similar health problems that cigarette smokers face, whether that’s respiratory heart disease or Cancer. As with any other tobacco product, I expect regular shisha smokers will find it addictive, to the point that they may need it every day.”

According to research carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO), the volume of smoke inhaled in an hour long Shisha session is estimated to be the equivalent of smoking between 100 and 200 cigarettes. The estimated findings go on to show that, on average, a smoker will inhale half a litre of smoke per cigarette, while a Shisha smoker can take in anything from just under a sixth of a litre to a litre of smoke per inhale.

But NTAG, a tobacco experts from London suggests the WHO findings are “alarmist”, pointing out that there’s not yet been enough research into the long term of effects of Shisha smoking. Dr. Kamal Chaouachi, a tobacco expert who teaches at Paris IX University and has researched Shisha for 15 years, says comparing Shisha with cigarettes “amounts to comparing oranges to apple.”

According to Chaouachi, studies led by independent researchers at the Royal University of Saudi Arabia have shown that Shisha smoke is 30 times less concentrated in chemicals than cigarette smoke, contradicting the WHO’s warning. “It is ludicrous and anti scientific to claim that hookah or Shisha smoke is 200 times more toxic than cigarette smoke,” he says, “while about 5,000 chemicals have been identified so far in cigarette smoke, chemists and pharmacologists from Saudi Arabia only found 142 chemicals in Shisha smoke. Also, a medical team in Pakistan found that Shisha smoke can be much less carcinogenic and radioactive than cigarette smoke.”

In previous days, the BBC issued a news story claiming that GPs in Leicester are seeing an increase in teenagers with health problems linked to Shisha pipe smoking.”

Even one cigarette can prove lethal

As little as one cigarette a day, or even just inhaling smoke from someone else’s cigarette, could be enough to cause a heart attack and even death, warn a report by US Surgeon General, Dr. Regina M. Benjamin.

“The chemicals in tobacco smoke reach your lungs quickly every time you inhale causing damage immediately,” Benjamin said in a statement, “Inhaling even the smallest amount of tobacco smoke can also damage your DNA, which can lead to cancer.”

And the more you are exposed, the harder it is for your body to repair the damage. Smoking also weakens the immune system and make it harder for the body to

respond to treatment if a smoking linked cancer does arise.

It is a really good thing when the Surgeon General comes out and gives a wide scope to the dangers of smoking.” Said Dr. Len Horovitz, a pulmonary specialists with Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. They are looking at every small mounts of smoke and this is dramatic. It’s showing the effect is immediate and does not take very much concentration. In other words, there is no safe level of smoking. It is a zero tolerance issue.”

A report of the Surgeon General: How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease . The Biology and Behavioral Basis for smoking attributable disease, is the first tobacco report from Surgeon General Benjamin and the 30th since the landmark 1964 surgeon general’s report that first linked smoking to lung cancer. More so than previous reports, this one focused on specific pathways by which smoking does its damage. Some 70 of the 7,000 chemicals and compounds in cigarettes can cause cancer, while hundreds of the others are toxic, inflaming the lining of the airways and potentially leading to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a major killer, in the United States. The chemicals also corrode blood vessels and increase the likelihood of blood clots, upping the risk for heart conditions.

Smoking is responsible for about 85 percent of lung cancers in the United States. But this report puts more emphasis on the link between smoking and the nation’s no. 1 killer, heart disease. This report went way beyond pulmonary issues, which people are all too familiar with but got into cardiovascular risks.”

Horovitz said.

“We have known that even a few cigarettes a day could triple your risk of heart disease. If you have a 3 percent risk of cardiac issues as a light smoker you could have 9 or 10 percent. That’s significant, it’s a little Russian Roulette.”

And the problems don’t stop there, the report stated. Smoking cigarettes can interfere with blood sugar control for Diabetes and can help spur a range of pregnancy and Birth related problems such as Miscarriage, Low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).