

# Shisha tobacco harms

## Factsheet for the community

### What is shisha tobacco?

Shisha tobacco is usually a combination of tobacco fermented in molasses and flavoured with fruit flavours.

Generally, shisha tobacco has a distinct sweet and fruit-flavoured aroma and is smoked through a waterpipe.

Other names for a waterpipe include shisha, nargile, hookah, argile, goza and hubble bubble.

The device is designed so that the smoke passes through water or another liquid before reaching the smoker (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2015).



### Is shisha tobacco harmful?

There is a common misunderstanding that shisha tobacco use is a safer option to cigarette smoking.

This is incorrect.

Shisha tobacco smokers can be exposed to similar or higher levels of harmful chemicals compared with cigarette smoking.

### What is in shisha tobacco smoke?

The smoke from shisha tobacco contains different ratios of harmful, cancer-causing substances compared to that of cigarette smoke.

This is partly due to the burning of charcoal to heat the shisha tobacco (Shihadeh et al., 2015; WHO, 2015).

For example, compared to smoking a single cigarette, a shisha tobacco smoker will inhale during an average shisha session:

- **two to three times** the amount of nicotine
- **about 11 times** the amount of carbon monoxide
- **about 25 times** the amount of tar
- **tens of times** more lead (Primack et al., 2016; Shihadeh et al., 2015)

### What are the health risks of shisha tobacco?

Like cigarettes, Shisha tobacco smoking has both immediate and long term negative health effects.

The immediate health effects include:

- elevated heart rate and blood pressure
- impaired lung function
- lower exercise capacity
- acute carbon monoxide poisoning (WHO, 2015).

The long term health effects associated with shisha tobacco smoking are:

- cancers
- heart disease
- respiratory disease
- low birth weight in newborns
- decreased bone density and fractures (WHO, 2015).

People exposed to the second-hand smoke of shisha tobacco are at risk of respiratory and other health problems. Children are particularly vulnerable (Smith-Simon, Maziak, Ward & Eissenberg, 2008; Tamim et al., 2003).

## Further information

For more information:

- call the Tobacco Information Line on 1300 136 775
- visit the [tobacco reforms website](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/tobaccoreforms)  
<[www.health.vic.gov.au/tobaccoreforms](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/tobaccoreforms)>.

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone the Tobacco Information Line on 1300 136 775 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email [tobaccopolicy@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:tobaccopolicy@health.vic.gov.au)

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