

June 25, 2015

Dear members of the Licensing and Standards Committee,

I'm Buvani, and I'm a member of the Youth Health Action Network (YHAN) which is an established group of youth from across the City of Toronto. We are passionate about taking action on health issues affecting young Torontonians through education and advocacy, namely in the area of tobacco control.

A few of us spoke at the Board of Health meeting on June 1<sup>st</sup> about hookah use amongst the youth in our city, and today I'm here on behalf of YHAN to do the same. We have seen hookah use increase in popularity over the past few years with but what is especially alarming to me is that youth as young as grade 7 have admitted to using hookah, which means that my thirteen year old cousin and others her age could potentially be inhaling harmful chemicals and toxins such as carbon monoxide and tar (Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 2013 & BOH 2015 Report).

And while adolescents' initial experiences with hookah may be experimental it is not hard for this experience to become habitual since a wide variety of flavours, colours, and designs makes the practice appear fashionable and trendy. Hookah is also seen as a way to socialize, is easily accessible and is quite affordable. In fact a night at a hookah lounge lasts just as long as a movie and is only half the price!

However, there are numerous negatives to smoking hookah that many youth are not aware of. This really concerns us because we see many hookah lounges opening up around Toronto that are promoting and targeting their services towards young people. Our concern made us curious to know what youth actually thought and knew about hookah so we took to the streets and made the following street buzz video.

➤ Street Buzz Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGdbvbN0ICs>

As you can see, many students thought there wasn't much of a risk in smoking hookah and that it was a healthier alternative to smoking. We're misled to think that the "herbal" aspect of it means that it's healthy, but this is obviously not the case. This is a scary thought and something that I can personally relate to.

One of my best friends is a total health nut; she exercises regularly, is the leader of one of our campus health groups, and is very careful about what she puts in her body. So you can imagine my surprise when she suggested that we go out to a hookah lounge to celebrate her birthday. She said that there was one just near her house that a lot of student frequent and that it'd only cost us around \$5-6 dollars. Even after I told her about the risks associated with hookah she remained dubious and said that it couldn't be *that* bad because "people" kept saying it was herbal and healthy. Since YHAN was hearing a lot of the same themes emerge from our peers we decided to



take action and created materials like informative postcards and videos, and participated in outreach events to inform youth about the risks of hookah.

We recognize that education alone is not enough to address this issue, and so we ultimately support the recommendations of this report and those made in the May 2015 Board of Health report to ban hookah smoking in licensed establishments. We feel this is the best approach to protect employees, customers, and others who may not have a choice to be in these spaces, from the harmful effects of second-hand hookah smoke.

Regards,

The Youth Health Action Network

#### References

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2013). Ontario student drug use and health survey. Retrieved April 28, 2015, from [http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news\\_and\\_publications/ontario-student-drug-use-and-health-survey/Documents/2013%20OSDUHS%20Docs/2013OSDUHS\\_Detailed\\_DrugUseReport.pdf](http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/ontario-student-drug-use-and-health-survey/Documents/2013%20OSDUHS%20Docs/2013OSDUHS_Detailed_DrugUseReport.pdf)
- Toronto Public Health. (2015). Hookah (waterpipe) use in licensed establishments [PDF Document]. 1-12. Retrieved from June 24, 2015 <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-80194.pdf>.

# CLEARING THE SMOKE

## the truth about smoking hookah

**Fact:** Youth who are first-time smokers are picking up a hookah pipe more often than a cigarette.

**Fact:** Hookah is not a safe way to smoke tobacco.

**Fact:** Herbal shisha is not healthier than tobacco shisha.

**Fact:** Hookah, narghile, goza, hubble bubble; whatever you call it, if you are smoking shisha **you are smoking.**



**Second-hand** shisha smoke is harmful to non smokers

Smoke from all shisha, including herbal shisha, contains **cancer-causing** chemicals, **carbon monoxide** and **tar**

Unburned herbal shisha has been found to contain **heavy metals**, including **lead** and **arsenic**

Sharing hoses and mouthpieces can lead to an increased risk of contracting **tuberculosis**, **hepatitis** and **herpes**

Water in a hookah cools the smoke, but it **does not filter out harmful chemicals**

Visit [tph.to/hookah](http://tph.to/hookah) for more information and resources on the health effects of smoking hookah