People who smoke hookahs inhale significant amounts of nicotine, a physically addictive chemical, as well as compounds that can cause cancer, heart disease and other health problems, multiple reliable studies show.

Hookah is a bowl-shaped device with a tubular pipe. It also may be called waterpipe, shisha or hubble-bubble. Charcoal-heated air is passed through a tobacco mixture and then through a water-filled chamber and, ultimately, through the pipe for the user to inhale.

Often cited as a cultural practice, hookah is used in many countries around the world, and people seem to be accepting and embracing it quickly. In the US, it’s usually young adults, with studies indicating that about 10%-25% of them used hookah in the past month.

While it is against the law to smoke in public places, except in three Clifton businesses, hookah is nevertheless often offered at some restaurants and coffee shops, with retail shops also becoming common.

Some say leave it alone and argue that hookah is a cultural practice. Others say that hookah smoking is a good alternative to cigarette smoking. But the facts dispute that.

The fruit, honey and other flavorings that are used in hookah tobacco may make it sound healthy plus its moistness due to being passed through water all mask the fact that what hookah users and those around them are inhaling is simply tobacco smoke—with all of the health dangers that accompany it.

The Essex-Passaic Wellness Coalition (web.njms.rutgers.edu/EPWC) and the Clifton Health Department are working to educate our communities about the hazards of hookah use. Read more information on Hookah and Health in future issues of this magazine.
Habit Forming
- Every bit as addictive as cigarette smoking (clevelandclinic.org)
- Water pipe smoking delivers nicotine – the same highly addictive drug found in other tobacco products (CDC)

Oral Cancers
- Tobacco liquids from hookahs irritate the mouth and increase the risk of developing oral cancers (CDC)

Other Diseases
- Other diseases associated with hookah use:
  - Lung Cancer  • Cancer of the Esophagus  • Stomach Cancer
  - Reduced Lung Function  • Decreased Fertility  • Bladder Cancer (CDC)

Kills Brain Cells
- 1 hour-long hookah smoking session = approximately 200 puffs, while smoking an average cigarette = 20 puffs (CDC)

Additional Health Risks
- Infections may be passed to other smokers by sharing the mouthpiece:
  - Oral Herpes  • Tuberculosis (CDC)

High Levels of Toxic Agents
- Charcoal used to heat tobacco products contains high levels of:
  - Carbon monoxide  • Toxic Metals
  - Cancer-causing Chemicals (carcinogens)

The Essex-Passaic Wellness Coalition (on the web at web.njms.rutgers.edu/EPWC) is made possible by a grant from the NJ Department of Health’s Office of Cancer Control and Prevention to Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. The EPWC implements the New Jersey Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan (see www.njcancer.gov) in Essex and Passaic Counties. The EPWC also receives in-kind support from Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and other organizations. Call the EPWC at 973-972-4623.

It’s Against The Law

Ony three Clifton businesses—Jamie’s Cigar Bar, Kamil’s Restaurant and La Ziza lounge—were permitted to offer indoor smoking when the State-wide Smoke-free Air Act Initiative was approved in 2006. Since then, the Clifton Health Department has issued over $70,000 in fines to establishment owners and most of these offenses are related to indoor hookah smoking. Both patrons who are observed to be smoking and establishment owners can be fined up to $1,000 for smoking indoors. If you find any establishment in violation of the NJ Smoke-free Air Act, contact the Clifton Health Dept. at 973-470-5760.