

Study finds hookah smoking popular among college crowd

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By Pohla Smith, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

More than 40 percent of the students at a large northeastern university have smoked tobacco from a hookah, or water pipe, according to a study by University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine researchers now online in the "Annals of Behavioral Medicine."

However, of that group of hookah users, more than one-third had never smoked a cigarette.

"I think that's a key finding. There's an overlap in a lot of people [who have smoked both], but there were over a third of the people smoking water pipes who would otherwise have never touched a cigarette," said Dr. Brian Primack, lead author of the study and an assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics in Pitt's School of Medicine.

". . . [Hookahs] are reaching a group of young people who otherwise would have been nicotine- and tobacco-naive. . . .

"We don't really know what the implication of that is," Dr. Primack added. "Some people might say that it wouldn't make a difference -- somebody who is exposed to a few water pipe sessions, that might not change their risk of later using tobacco products. But I think there are a lot of researchers who would be concerned and say that even intermittent exposure at this age to nicotine and tobacco will increase their likelihood of becoming addicted to nicotine and continuing to use some tobacco product later on."

The survey was sent by e-mail during a final exams period to 3,600 students, and 647 responded. "That's a typical response for an e-mail survey, unfortunately," Dr. Primack said. "That's about 20 percent, about what we expected . . . but we wouldn't expect that to affect results."

More details in tomorrow's Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

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