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Students hooked on hookahs

By Allison M. Heinrichs

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Thursday, September 4, 2008



More than two in five college students have smoked tobacco from a waterpipe, or hookah, and researchers are concerned because a third of those students otherwise would have been tobacco-free, according to a University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine study.

"Over one-third of those who used waterpipes to smoke tobacco over the past year had never smoked a cigarette," Dr. Brian Primack, assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics at Pitt and lead author of the Annals of Behavioral Medicine research article, said in a news release today.

"Clearly young people believe hookah smoking is somehow different than smoking cigarettes, but waterpipe smoke has many of the same chemicals as cigarette smoke and likely poses many of the same health risks.

A waterpipe is used to inhale tobacco that is usually flavored and sweetened. According to the researchers, more than 200 waterpipe cafes have opened in the United States over the past decade.

Researchers received survey responses from 647 undergraduate and graduate students at a large U.S. university, which they did not identify. Just over 40 percent said they had smoked tobacco from a waterpipe, slightly higher than the 39.6 percent who said they had smoked cigarettes.

"Waterpipe smoking may become even more popular in the near future since many of the new smoke-free ordinances being passed by local governments exempt waterpipe cafes," Primack said. "Waterpipe smoking is going to be a crucial public-health issue that will require increased surveillance and study."

Pennsylvania's smoking ban goes into effect Sept. 11 and exempts waterpipe cafes that file for and are granted an exception because the majority of their sales are tobacco-related.

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