

## LETTERS

## WATERPIPE TOBACCO SMOKING

# Waterpipe tobacco smoking may undermine the progress made in curbing cigarette smoking

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The recent news report highlights how hookah pipes may serve as a gateway to cigarette smoking.<sup>1</sup> Longitudinal studies among adolescents in Denmark and Jordan came to similar conclusions.<sup>2,3</sup> Compared with other nicotine containing products, such as smokeless tobacco and electronic cigarettes, the gateway hypothesis for waterpipes seems to be a largely undisputed public health concern. This is worrying considering the growing prevalence of waterpipe smoking among young people in some settings.

Waterpipe tobacco smoking also poses direct harms. A recent meta-analysis found significant associations between waterpipe tobacco smoking and lung cancer, low birth weight, and periodontal disease.<sup>4</sup> Secondhand waterpipe tobacco smoke also induces respiratory illness in children.<sup>4</sup> All this is despite the widespread misconception that waterpipe tobacco smoking is safer than cigarette smoking.

Regulation of waterpipe tobacco should take into account its potential as a gateway product and its direct harms. Unfortunately, both aspects have been largely ignored in recent tobacco control advancements. For example, in the US, the Food and Drug Administration regulates cigarettes, loose tobacco, and smokeless tobacco products, but not waterpipe tobacco. In the European Union, recent bans on flavoured tobacco, due for

national implementation by mid-2016, will apply only to manufactured and hand rolled cigarettes, not waterpipe tobacco.<sup>5</sup>

In October 2014, WHO pushed waterpipe tobacco regulation to the front of its agenda after the Conference of the Parties meeting (<http://cop6russia.org/>), although it remains to be seen whether national bodies will follow suit. We continue our call for increased regulation of waterpipe tobacco smoking to reduce its potential to undermine progress made in curbing cigarette smoking.

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Full response at: [www.bmj.com/content/349/bmj.g7546/rr/813586](http://www.bmj.com/content/349/bmj.g7546/rr/813586).

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