

# The Era of COVID-19 Pandemic: A Good Time to Ban Social Shisha Smoking

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## Abstract

Shisha mouthpiece sharing is a practice in some social gatherings. With the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, placing a ban on social shisha smoking in public places will help reduce the spread of the disease.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Transmission, Hookah, Waterpipe, Shisha, Mouthpiece.

Dear Editor,

Shisha smoking is a social behaviour that is commonly practiced among family and friends<sup>1,2</sup>. In fact, some people smoke shisha to celebrate birthdays and some other life achievements such as graduation, house warming, and more<sup>1-3</sup>. Shisha smoking is a pleasurable social activity, more especially among the youth<sup>1-4</sup>; sometimes two or more youth gather to smoke shisha together, and the average session of shisha smoking consists of one hundred and seventy-one puffs of 530-mL shisha smoke of 2.6 seconds duration at a frequency of 2.8 puffs per minute<sup>2,3,5</sup>.

In Thailand, there was a recent incident where a group of 15 persons attended a party<sup>6</sup>. During the party, 10 persons, aged 25 to 28 years, shared same stick of burning cigarette (to smoke) in the party with a person (n=1) having COVID-19 infection. Four days after, all those persons (n=11) that shared same cigarette tested positive of COVID-19 while those persons (n=4) who did not take a share were tested negative. Scientific investigation into this case showed that COVID 19 can be transmitted via same cigarette sharing<sup>6</sup>.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that social cigarette smoking is a route of COVID-19 transmission among persons. On the other hand, if we take a look into anecdotal and scientific reports on shisha smoking, we will observe that

social shisha smoking is also another route of COVID-19 transmission, more especially through shisha mouthpiece sharing<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, based on the existing evidences<sup>1-5,7</sup>, it can be projected that many people will contract COVID-19 through social shisha smoking, and the frequency of transmission of the disease via this route will be much more than social cigarette smoking. This projection was based on the following evidences<sup>1-5,7</sup>: (1) cigarette is a single-use item while shisha is an item that can be used multiply (hence; shisha has a higher possibility of causing cross-infection); (2) shisha smoking is more socially acceptable than cigarette smoking, in many countries (this relatively high social acceptability rate encourages people to gather and smoke shisha in groups); (3) there are erroneous beliefs, among the lay public, that shisha smoking is safer than cigarette (such ignorance influences people to keep-on smoking shisha); (4) many countries do not have a specific law banning shisha smoking in public places, unlike cigarette (this encourages shisha smoking in the communities).

With the on-going events of partial and total lockdowns in different countries of the world due to COVID-19 pandemic<sup>8,9</sup>, there is a high possibility that some of these countries will soon start easing the lockdowns due to socio-economic activities<sup>9</sup>.

Since shisha smoking is a common social activity that is often practiced by two or more persons<sup>2,3</sup>, then social shisha smoking, more especially in public places, should be banned as soon as possible.

The enactment of national laws specifically banning social shisha smoking as well as shisha smoking in public places is of huge public health benefits, as regards curbing the rate of COVID transmission, especially in this current era of COVID-19 pandemic.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author has none to declare.

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