The Hon Stephen Wade
Minister for Health
GPO Box 2555
ADELAIDE SA 5001

MinisterforHealth@sa.gov.au

Dear Minister

URGENT: COVID-19 and Shisha – recommending immediate ban of the public use of Shisha (water pipe use) in SA and nationally

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public's health in Australia, and seeks to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, evidence informed policy and effective population-based practice in public health.

The World Health Organisation has now declared the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19 a pandemic and has called on countries to take "urgent and aggressive action". We commend your actions in recent days and weeks to reduce the potential impact of this pandemic on our health system.

As you would be aware, in South Australia, and Australia, there are a number of businesses selling Shisha or waterpipe smoking for public use. Sharing of such pipes, during a pandemic such as this, and during a time of social distancing, has the strong potential to increase transmission of COVID-19. We urge you to review the attached briefing written by representatives from the World Health Organisation (also link here https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/waterpipes/covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR2vnmMKJ7xzbu9IKRtZVWSJolG_7LTuFQ-00uMgQBY06_w0LMZBJJaPle8).

Specifically the briefing[1] notes that:

> "The risk of transmission of infectious microbial agents through smoking waterpipes is high.
>
> - If mouth pieces are not used individually the microorganisms can easily pass from mouth to mouth.
> - smokers often cough into hoses and moisture in tobacco smoke promotes the survival of microorganisms inside waterpipe hose.
> - Furthermore, the use of cold water in the water chamber for a cold airflow may facilitate the survival of viruses and bacteria.
> - The spread of infectious diseases could also result from the uncontrolled, manual preparation of narghile.
>
> **Evidence of Infectious Disease transmission though waterpipe**
> Waterpipes and mouthpieces have been implicated in an outbreak of pulmonary tuberculosis in Queensland, Australia [2, 3]. El-Barrawy et al.[4] related infection with *Helicobacter pylori* to waterpipes smoking in Egypt. The risk of transmission of the hepatitis C virus through waterpipes smoking was also demonstrated by Habib et al. (2001) [5]. Other viruses that can be transmitted are Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), herpes simplex virus and respiratory virus [6]. Fungal infections have also been reported to be waterpipes transmitted diseases when a patient with acute myeloid leukemia showed invasive infection with Aspergillus sp.[7]"

The report specially recommends that countries bring in a **'Complete ban of the use of waterpipes in all public establishments such as cafes, bars, restaurants, etc. with no exceptions even if the mouthpiece or hose is changed with each individual use. Avoid sharing waterpipe mouthpieces even in home settings.'**

As at 16 March, 2020 - Countries such as Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have now banned the use of shisha in public places to avoid COVID-19 transmission. We urge you to do the same as a matter of priority. This may also require targeted communication to the relevant groups (and may not necessarily require mass population communication).

Yours Sincerely,





Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Kate Kameniar
PHAA Branch President
South Australia

cc.

Greg Westenberg Greg.Westenberg@sa.gov.au

A/Professor Nicola Spurrier Nicola.Spurrier@sa.gov.au

Dr Michael Cusack Michael.Cusack@sa.gov.au

Dr Chris Lease Chris.Lease@sa.gov.au

Dr Evan Everest Evan.Everest@sa.gov.au

References

1. Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking Knowledge Hub. *Increased risk of COVID-19 infection among smokers and amongst waterpipe users*. 2020 [cited 2020 March 16]; Available from: https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/waterpipes/covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR2vnmMKJ7xzbu9IKRtZVWSJolG_7LTuFQ-00uMgQBY06_w0LMZBJJaPle8.
2. Urkin, J., R. Ochaion, and A. Peleg, *Hubble bubble equals trouble: the hazards of water pipe smoking.* The Scientific World Journal, 2006. **6**: p. 1990-1997.
3. Munckhof, W.J., et al., *A cluster of tuberculosis associated with use of a marijuana water pipe.* The International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, 2003. **7**(9): p. 860-865.
4. El Barrawy, M., M. Morad, and M. Gaber, *Role of Helicobacter pylori in the genesis of gastric ulcerations among smokers and nonsmokers.* Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, 1997. **3**: p. 316-321.
5. Habib, M., et al., *Hepatitis C virus infection in a community in the Nile Delta: risk factors for seropositivity.* Hepatology, 2001. **33**(1): p. 248-253.
6. Knishkowy, B. and Y.J.P. Amitai, *Water-pipe (narghile) smoking: an emerging health risk behavior.* 2005. **116**(1): p. e113-e119.
7. Szyper-Kravitz, M., et al., *Early invasive pulmonary aspergillosis in a leukemia patient linked to aspergillus contaminated marijuana smoking.* 2001. **42**(6): p. 1433-1437.