

Hookah smoking carries a poisoning risk

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(HealthDay)—Many people think hookah smoking is less harmful than cigarettes, but they might not realize that hookahs can cause carbon monoxide poisoning, a medical expert warns.

The devices—also called water pipes—are heated by burning charcoal. That releases [carbon monoxide](#), a colorless and [odorless gas](#).

About 100 cases of [carbon monoxide poisoning](#) caused by hookahs have been reported in the United States and other countries, according to Dr. Diane Calello. She's medical director of the Poison Control Center at the Rutgers New Jersey Medical School's department of emergency medicine.

The risk for carbon monoxide poisoning from hookahs depends on the size of the space where they're used, the number of people smoking and the amount of ventilation, Calello explained.

Hookahs should only be used in large, well-ventilated areas, she said. If you use a hookah at home, be sure your home has carbon monoxide detectors. If you go to a hookah bar, ask if it has carbon monoxide detectors, Calello advised.

Common symptoms of low-level carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, sleepiness, fatigue, confusion and irritability. Higher carbon monoxide levels can cause nausea, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, vision and coordination problems, brain damage and death.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can easily be confused with symptoms of viral illnesses, like the common cold or the flu, Calello noted.

Carbon monoxide poisoning should be considered a medical emergency. Get immediate help if you suspect someone was exposed to [carbon monoxide](#). If the person is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up or seizing, call 911. Otherwise, contact the Poison Control Center at 800-222-1222.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [carbon monoxide poisoning](#).

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