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### E-cigarettes and water pipes could cause cancer too! World No Tobacco Day – 31 May 2016

While Australia is proudly the world leader when it comes to plain packaging of tobacco products, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) is targeting non-traditional forms of smoking and tobacco consumption; warning that they too can contribute to increasing a person's risk of cancer including possibly oral cancer as we recognise World No Tobacco Day (31 May).

Established by the World Health Organisation, World No Tobacco Day aims to highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use and advocate for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption.

Dr Peter Alldritt, Chair of the ADA's Oral Health Committee, said: "While tobacco consumption by Australians is decreasing, a building body of reports indicate that instead some Australians are 'soft' substituting through use of e-cigarettes sometimes referred to as vaping, and water pipe smoking (also known as hookah, argileh, hubbly bubbly, nargila, shisha and goza).

However this 'soft' substitution is a double edged sword. The Medical Journal of Australia suggests that people who consume e-cigarettes are less likely to quit smoking.<sup>1</sup> Also, water-pipe smokers of either tobacco or non-tobacco products face the same health risks as cigarette smokers, including cancers, heart disease, lung disease and problems in pregnancy such as low birth weight. This is because a water-pipe smoker may breathe in as much smoke during a typical one-hour session as a cigarette smoker would inhale from 100-200 cigarettes."

While non-tobacco water pipe smoking may not contain the nicotine found in tobacco, the smoke contains highly toxic substances. The addition of fruit flavouring and sweeteners does not reduce the harmful effects of the smoke.

Dr Alldritt continued, "In other words, smoking e-cigarettes or water pipes, whether tobacco filled or not, could increase a person's risk of cancer".

Every day, at least three Australians are diagnosed with oral cancer. Oral cancer is an aggressive disease which often goes undetected until it reaches an advanced stage; with a survival rate of only 50% over five years.

The signs and symptoms of oral cancer include:

- A sore, irritation, lump or thick patch in the mouth, lip, or throat
- A chronic ulcer or blood blister in the mouth that does not heal
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Difficulty moving the jaw or tongue
- Prolonged swollen glands
- A sore throat that does not go away
- Difficulty speaking, or a change in the voice

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- Numbness in the tongue or other areas of the mouth
  - Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable

Dr Alldritt concluded: “The data and research around the health impacts of smoking e-cigarettes and water pipes is still in its early stages. It is an area that needs greater investment, research and attention. The ADA urges everyone to apply the precautionary principle: if you can smoke it, avoid it.”

### Reference

1. McKee M, Daube M, Chapman S. ‘E-cigarettes should be regulated’, *Med J Aust*, 2016; 204 (9): 331.

**Interviews available with:** Dr Peter Alldritt, Chair of the Australian Dental Association’s Oral Health Committee

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