



## **City Council Considers Strictly Regulating Hookah Bars**

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By Erin Billups

The City Council is considering legislation to limit the sale of hookahs and their use in restaurants. NY1's Erin Billups filed the following report.

As the number of hookah bars in the city doubled over the past few years studies finding dangerous health effects have also increased.

"The quality of the air far exceeds, in terms of pollutants and cancer causing agents, far exceeds every federal regulation," says Dr. Michael Weitzman, a professor for the Department of Environmental Medicine Pediatrics at NYU.

Weitzman and his students at NYU worked with the city Health Department last year in an undercover investigation of hookah bars, finding that a form of tobacco is often smoked in the water pipes - a violation of the city's Smoke Free Air Act.

But tobacco is not the only problem in Hookah use. Almost anything that's smoked produces harmful pollutants.

"They believe there is not nicotine in the product, they believe that it is not harmful, perhaps because it's filtered by water. All of those beliefs are not true," explains Kevin Schroth, Senior Legal Counsel for Tobacco Control at the city Department of Health.

In a health committee hearing last week, City Council members and health department officials sought to clear the air - proposing that what's smoked in hookah bars be strictly regulated.

Under the legislation, only tobacco stores and restaurants earning 50 percent of their sales from hookah would be allowed to continue selling it, businesses would have to post signs of the associated dangers and the minimum age to purchase would be raised to 21 from 18.

"Indoor smoking continues to plague our city and threaten the health of so many New Yorkers and now ladies and gentleman it's time to address the elephant in the room," said City Councilman Vincent Gentile.

Weitzman testified that problems go beyond first or second hand exposure to third-hand exposure when pollutants in hookah smoke stay in clothes, and become dust that's ingested.

An outright ban would devastate Hookah-serving businesses that already oppose the legislation as is.

Sponsors plan to meet with hookah bar owners to see if compromise is possible.

<http://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/health-and-medicine/2016/02/29/city-council-considers-strictly-regulating-hookah-bars.html>