

Smokeless tobacco, waterpipes and heated tobacco: FAQ

There have been a number of enquiries related to smokeless tobacco and other tobacco products from UKAF dental and medical staff. All forms of tobacco use present a major risk to oral and general health. This FAQ was prepared to orient UKAF dental and medical professionals to these products, share the latest evidence about risk, and provide guidance about how to document their use and address with personnel.

This FAQ was prepared by UKAF in collaboration with the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). We have used sections from the ASH briefing on smokeless tobacco in this FAQ.¹

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is smokeless tobacco?

- A. The term smokeless tobacco covers a wide range of tobacco-containing products that are not smoked but rather may be chewed, inhaled or placed in the mouth.¹ Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) has published an excellent summary, Smokeless tobacco products: <https://ash.org.uk/uploads/smokelesstobaccoeip.pdf>



Loose leaf



Snus (pre-packaged)



Snus (loose)



Snuff



There are several types of smokeless tobacco products, and a brief overview of the main types is provided below.

- **Chewing tobacco:** Coarsely chopped tobacco that is placed between the cheek and lower gum. North American chewing tobacco has been popular among US service personnel. Chewing tobacco can be in the form of loose leaf, plug, or twist. It can be chewed or not. It is often flavoured or sweetened. Additionally, there are several types of chewing tobacco that are popular in South Asian communities including gutka, paan masala, betel quid and paan (see below).
- **Snus:** A type of moist powdered tobacco (pasteurised and air-cured tobacco) that is sold as either a loose powder or pre-packaged in small sachets. Snus is placed between the lip and gum where nicotine dissolves in saliva and enters the blood stream. It contains ground tobacco, salt and may contain food-grade smoke aroma flavourings. Snus originates from Sweden. However, it is banned for sale in the UK and Europe.
- **Snuff and nasal tobacco:** A type of tobacco made of finely ground or shredded tobacco leaves that may have different flavours or scents and comes in moist or dry form. Moist snuff is placed between lip and gum. Dry snuff is absorbed through the nasal cavity.
- **Dissolvable:** Dissolvable tobacco products are powdered tobacco pressed into shapes, such as tablets, sticks or strips. Some contain sweeteners or flavoring and may look like candy. The pressed tobacco is chewed or held in the mouth until it dissolves. This type of smokeless tobacco is currently banned for sale under the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations (TRPR).

Q. What are the health risks associated with smokeless tobacco?

- A.** Like cigarette smoking, smokeless tobacco poses a significant risk to oral and general health. Smokeless tobacco use has been shown to increase the risk for periodontal diseases, oral lesions and is a well-established risk factor for oropharyngeal cancers.²⁻⁸ Evidence also suggests a strong association between some Smokeless Tobacco Products (STP) use and increased risk of ischaemic heart disease, stroke and adverse perinatal outcomes.²⁻⁴ As with combustible tobacco, some smokeless tobacco use has been linked to a range of oral problems that include tooth staining and wear, periodontal disease, bad breath (halitosis) and tooth loss.¹ Having said this, because there is no inhalation of smoke, the risks to general health are not as significant and wide-ranging as from smoked tobacco.

Q. Some pouches contain tobacco and some do not. How do we tell the difference?

- A. Indeed, there can be confusion between traditional snus (tobacco-containing) and nicotine pouches (tobacco-free products) as both come in small sachets sold in tins which are placed between the lip and gum. While the products may be similar in appearance, they should be considered two distinct products with one containing tobacco and the other containing nicotine but no tobacco. As a tobacco product, traditional snus is regulated differently, has a different risk profile and cannot be legally sold in the UK. For more information on nicotine pouches see the nicotine pouches briefing ([include link here](#)).



Snus (pre-packaged)



Snus (loose)



Nicotine pouches

Q. What is betel quid, paan or gutka?

- A. Below is a brief summary of smokeless tobacco used in South Asian and Somali communities. Like other forms of chewing tobacco their use increases the risk of mouth and oesophageal cancer. These products are harmful even without tobacco.

Paan masala

Paan masala is a mixture that can include betel leaves, tobacco, sweetened rose petals paste, sugar, fennel seeds, dry dates, cardamom, clove, coriander seeds, herbs and amla.

Betel quid, paan and gutka

Betel quid and paan contain a mixture of ingredients, including betel nut (also called areca nut), herbs, spices and often tobacco, wrapped in a betel leaf that are chewed.^{1,9} Their use is widespread in Southeast Asia, Micronesia, Island Melanesia, and South Asia. Gutka is a pre-packaged tobacco-containing product.



Q. What about hookah, shisha (waterpipe) use?

- A.** Hookah (also known as shisha or waterpipe) are used to smoke tobacco that comes in different flavours (NHS website). It is a traditional form of tobacco used in Eastern Mediterranean countries but has become popular globally, and not just amongst diaspora.¹⁰ Many people wrongly perceive waterpipe smoking as less harmful than smoking because of the perception that water filters out the harmful substances in the smoke (NHS 2010). However, they are considered to be similarly as harmful as smoking cigarettes and lead to many of the same health effects.⁹ Like cigarette smoke, waterpipe smoke contains metals, carbon monoxide and cancer-causing chemicals.⁹⁻¹² Their use increases risk of cancer, including oral and esophageal cancer, heart disease, respiratory problems and gum disease.^{10,12} Some shisha mixes do not contain tobacco but are still harmful because of the smoke.



Q. What about heated tobacco products such as IQOS?

- A.** Heated tobacco products (also known as Heat not Burn products) were introduced to the UK in 2016. While newer devices resemble a vaping device (e-cigarette), these devices heat actual tobacco which means they are considered a tobacco product and have a totally different risk profile to vapes.¹³⁻¹⁴ The tobacco is heated rather than burned, creating emissions which when inhaled mimic the experience and taste of smoking. They heat a small plug of tobacco (often contained in a 'pod' or stick that looks like a very small cigarette) to below 300°C, producing an inhalable vapour. Use of heated tobacco products in the UK is relatively low. At present there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion on safety and risk to health; however, available research has found users are exposed to toxicants at substantially lower levels than from cigarettes.¹³⁻¹⁴ Given the lack of research, current guidance does not advise on the use of heated tobacco products for quitting.





MOD Guidance

Very Brief Advice can be delivered to all personnel at regular intervals. As part of the delivery of VBA on smoking it is recommended that personnel are asked about smoking cigarettes and other forms of tobacco. Training on Very Brief Advice for UKAF Dental and Medical Staff is available via the National Centre for Smoking Cessation: <https://elearning.ncsct.co.uk/ukaf>

See short introductory video here: <https://youtu.be/d7D1zye8jpQ>

Q. How do I ask personnel about other forms of tobacco use?

- A. Ask personnel about smokeless tobacco, using the names that the various products are known by locally. If necessary, use visual aids to show them what the products look like.

Personnel can be asked a single question:

"Do you smoke cigarettes or use any other form of tobacco such as chewing tobacco or snus?"

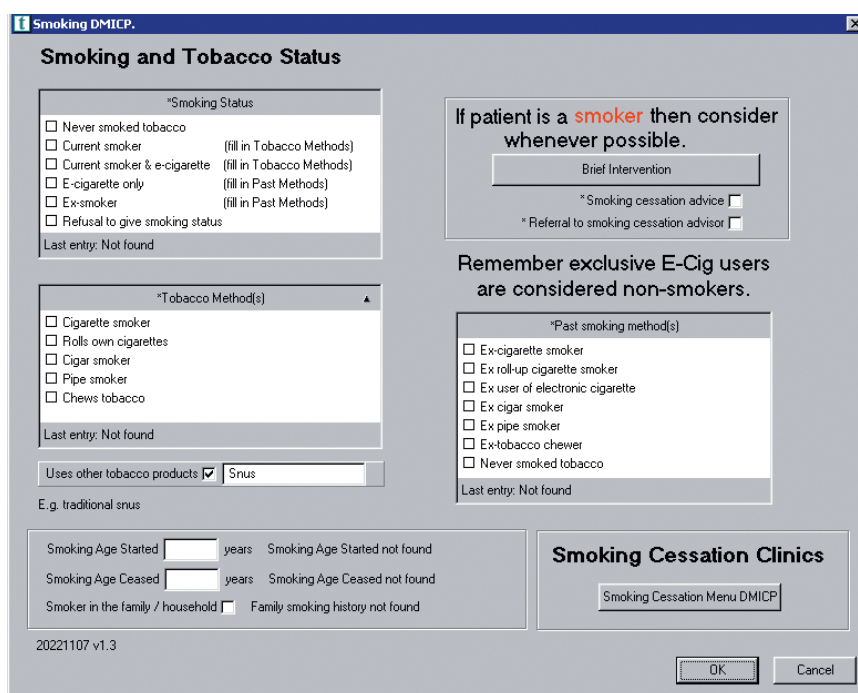
or two questions can be used:

"Do you smoke?"

"Do you use any form of smokeless tobacco products (e.g. chewing tobacco, snus)?"

Q. What should be recorded in the DMICP for snus or smokeless tobacco?

- A. The DMICP smoking and tobacco status template has recently been updated to include documentation of niche tobacco products (see image below). For any tobacco products that do not fall under the existing tobacco products list, clinical staff can tick the “Uses other tobacco product” box and use the description to record more details.



Smoking DMICP.

Smoking and Tobacco Status

***Smoking Status**

- ☐ Never smoked tobacco
- ☐ Current smoker (fill in Tobacco Methods)
- ☐ Current smoker & e-cigarette (fill in Tobacco Methods)
- ☐ E-cigarette only (fill in Past Methods)
- ☐ Ex-smoker (fill in Past Methods)
- ☐ Refusal to give smoking status

Last entry: Not found

***Tobacco Method(s)**

- ☐ Cigarette smoker
- ☐ Rolls own cigarettes
- ☐ Cigar smoker
- ☐ Pipe smoker
- ☐ Chews tobacco

Last entry: Not found

Uses other tobacco products ☒ Snus

E.g. traditional snus

Smoking Age Started years Smoking Age Started not found

Smoking Age Ceased years Smoking Age Ceased not found

Smoker in the family / household ☐ Family smoking history not found

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If patient is a smoker then consider whenever possible.

Brief Intervention

*Smoking cessation advice ☐

*Referral to smoking cessation advisor ☐

Remember exclusive E-Cig users are considered non-smokers.

***Past smoking method(s)**

- ☐ Ex-cigarette smoker
- ☐ Ex roll-up cigarette smoker
- ☐ Ex user of electronic cigarette
- ☐ Ex cigar smoker
- ☐ Ex pipe smoker
- ☐ Ex-tobacco chewer
- ☐ Never smoked tobacco

Last entry: Not found

Smoking Cessation Clinics

Smoking Cessation Menu DMICP

OK Cancel

Screenshot of Smoking DMICP template

Q. What should I do if personnel report use of smokeless tobacco products?

- A. Tobacco use in any form can be treated by smoking cessation services. Ensure personnel who use smokeless tobacco are aware of the health risks (for example, the risk of cardiovascular disease, oropharyngeal cancers and periodontal disease).¹⁵ Use a brief intervention to advise them of their options. Refer personnel who use smokeless tobacco who want to quit to Defence Stop Smoking Services for additional support.¹⁵ As with cigarettes, support for quitting smokeless tobacco includes the combination of behavioural support from a trained stop smoking practitioner and use of stop smoking medications such as NRT as appropriate to address withdrawal symptoms and urges to use tobacco.



Additional resources

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). Evidence into practice:
Smokeless tobacco products. March 2020.

<https://ash.org.uk/uploads/smokelesstobaccoeip.pdf>

NCSCT. Waterpipe tobacco smoking.

www.ncsct.co.uk/usr/pub/waterpipe_briefing.pdf

National Health Services (NHS). Delivering better oral health: an evidence based toolkit.
Guidance Chapter 11: Smoking and tobacco use.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention/chapter-11-smoking-and-tobacco-use



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