

Paul Dillon answers your questions...

EVEN IF YOU NORMALLY SKIP INTRODUCTIONS, PLEASE READ THIS:

Due to the controversial nature of this topic and the target audience (young people) it is important that the reader reads the complete answer and not simply one paragraph or a few sentences. Taking one part of the answer out of context can lead to a misinterpretation of the intended message.

Paul Dillon speaks to thousands of students across Australia providing information on alcohol and drugs, particularly in relation to looking after themselves and their friends. Some young people make contact with him to ask questions that they did not feel comfortable asking in front of their peers.

The Real Deal on Drugs allows young people to ask questions about drugs and provides them with access to accurate and up-to-date information.

Is a bong a safe way of smoking cannabis?



Hi Paul. I've got a few questions about bongs that I would like you to answer. Is a bong a safe way of smoking cannabis? Does the water really filter out some of the tar and other stuff from the smoke? If it doesn't, why does the bong water get so dirty?

A 'bong', also known as a water pipe, is a smoking device, generally used to smoke cannabis, tobacco, or other substances. In recent times bongs have become increasingly popular amongst young people, mainly due to the ease to which they can be used. Unlike a 'joint' (a cannabis cigarette), there is little preparation and some teens appear to enjoy the ritual of 'packing a cone' and passing it around a group. It also allows a much larger amount of smoke to be inhaled quickly as opposed to smaller, more frequent, inhalations of pipe and cigarette smoking.

To use a bong, the base of the pipe is usually filled with water. The cannabis (or cannabis mixture, usually mixed with tobacco, often referred to as 'mulling up') is packed into a 'cone' on the side of the bong and then lit. The user puts their mouth over the mouthpiece and inhales. The cannabis is then heated and smoke is produced and travels through the pipe to the water chamber. The smoke rises through the water, cooling the smoke, and then is trapped in the air chamber above the water. The user then inhales the cooler smoke.

The main reason that many teenagers believe the bong to be safer is because of the water. Friends have told them that this process actually removes the tar and other carcinogenic material from the smoke, thus reducing some of the risks associated with smoking. This is thought to be true due to the colour of the 'bong water'. It is often a dirty colour and although full of smoke impurities removes little, if any, tar and other harmful material. Interestingly it has also been found that bongs actually filter out more THC (the compound that gets you 'stoned') than they do tars, meaning you have to smoke more to get the desired effect!

It is important to remember that there is no safe way of using cannabis. If you are going to smoke the drug it is important to remember that it doesn't matter what the substance is, smoking is a dangerous route of administration. At the very least, using a bong forces the cannabis smoke deeper into the lungs. This exposes more of the lungs to tar and other harmful toxins without necessarily increasing the perceived positive effects, i.e., getting you more stoned. Contrary to what many people believe, a person does not necessarily get more of an effect from a bong.

It is also extremely important to note that when cannabis smokers use homemade bongs, these can cause greater problems because the plastic or aluminium can give off toxic fumes when heated.

So in answer to your three questions:

- **a bong is not a safe way of using cannabis** - like any drug, cannabis has a range of potential negative consequence. At the very least, when you use a bong, you are smoking the drug and there are risks associated with that
- **the water does not remove all of the tar and other dangerous materials** - the water is there to cool the smoke down and not 'clean the smoke'. It does not act as an effective filter and in fact is likely to remove more THC than tars
- **the bong water becomes dirty due to smoke particles and other materials**