

Hep C factsheets

Tattooing & piercing



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Also see

Unregistered tattooists and piercers may not care about their professional reputation or business, and while they may charge a lot less than other artists, the risks of infection are greater.

Having tattoos or piercings done in prison carries a great risk of HCV infection or reinfection - due to a high prevalence of HCV among prison inmates and limited availability of sterile equipment. If you're doing time inside, ask for information about safer body art by phoning the NSW Prisons Hep C Helpline.

Introduction

Many people think that the hardest decisions about having tattoos or piercings done are the design and colour - and where they should go. **WRONG!** Because of the real risks of infectious diseases, including hep C, the most important decision is who you select to do the tattoo or piercing!

Most tattoo and piercing artists should know the potential risks to themselves and their clients of infections from contaminated equipment and surroundings. A professional artist practises good hygiene, follows standard infection control guidelines (such as sterilisation of equipment) and is happy to discuss with clients their shop's approach to customer health and safety.

Beware of backyard operators

The greatest risk for transmission of infections comes from operators who do not follow the advice of body art associations and infection control recommendations of health authorities. Such operators may work from home or from unregistered tattoo shops.

The NSW Public Health Act requires tattooists and piercers to register their business address with their Local Government Authority (local council) and to comply with the *Skin Penetration Guidelines* (part of the NSW Public Health Act).

Choosing a studio

When you choose the studio where you think you might get your body art:

- look for a certificate of registration from the local Council - it should be displayed prominently in the shop,
- look for clean hygienic premises. Check benches, sinks and other work areas,
- ask the tattooist or piercer if they use new needles each time - if they reuse needles, ask how they are sterilised, and
- see if you can watch someone else being tattooed or pierced.

What to look for

While watching, observe if:

- new disposable gloves are worn for each client,
- the equipment that's used comes from sterile containers or bags,
- they open pre-packaged sterile equipment in front of clients,
- they use small separate containers of tattoo ink for each client, instead of dipping into one big container that many clients would use, and
- the body artist explains everything to the client.

More information?

- *Think before you ink / Don't sweat it / Going to a professional* (postcard set)
- *Healthy body art* (brochure)
- *Hygienic procedures for body piercers* (brochure)
- *Hygienic procedures for tattooists* (brochure)
- *Guidelines on Skin Penetration* - http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2000/pdf/guidelines_skin_pen.pdf

For a copy of the above resources, phone the *Hep C Helpline* on 02 9332 1599 or 1800 803 990.

For more information, also contact your Local Council (White Pages phone book).

- *This factsheet developed by the Hepatitis C Council of NSW.*