



## Acknowledgments

First published by Queensland Health in 1999 (based on the Department of Health and Aged Care publication "*Hygienic Procedures for Tattooists*")

"*Hygienic Procedures for Body Piercers*" was developed with assistance of a local government, the Hepatitis C Council of Queensland and a professional body piercer.

For further information please contact your State or Territory:

- Health Department (ask for Environmental Health or Communicable Diseases);
- Hepatitis C Council.

For further copies please phone the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care publications hotline on 1 800 020 103 (ext.8654)

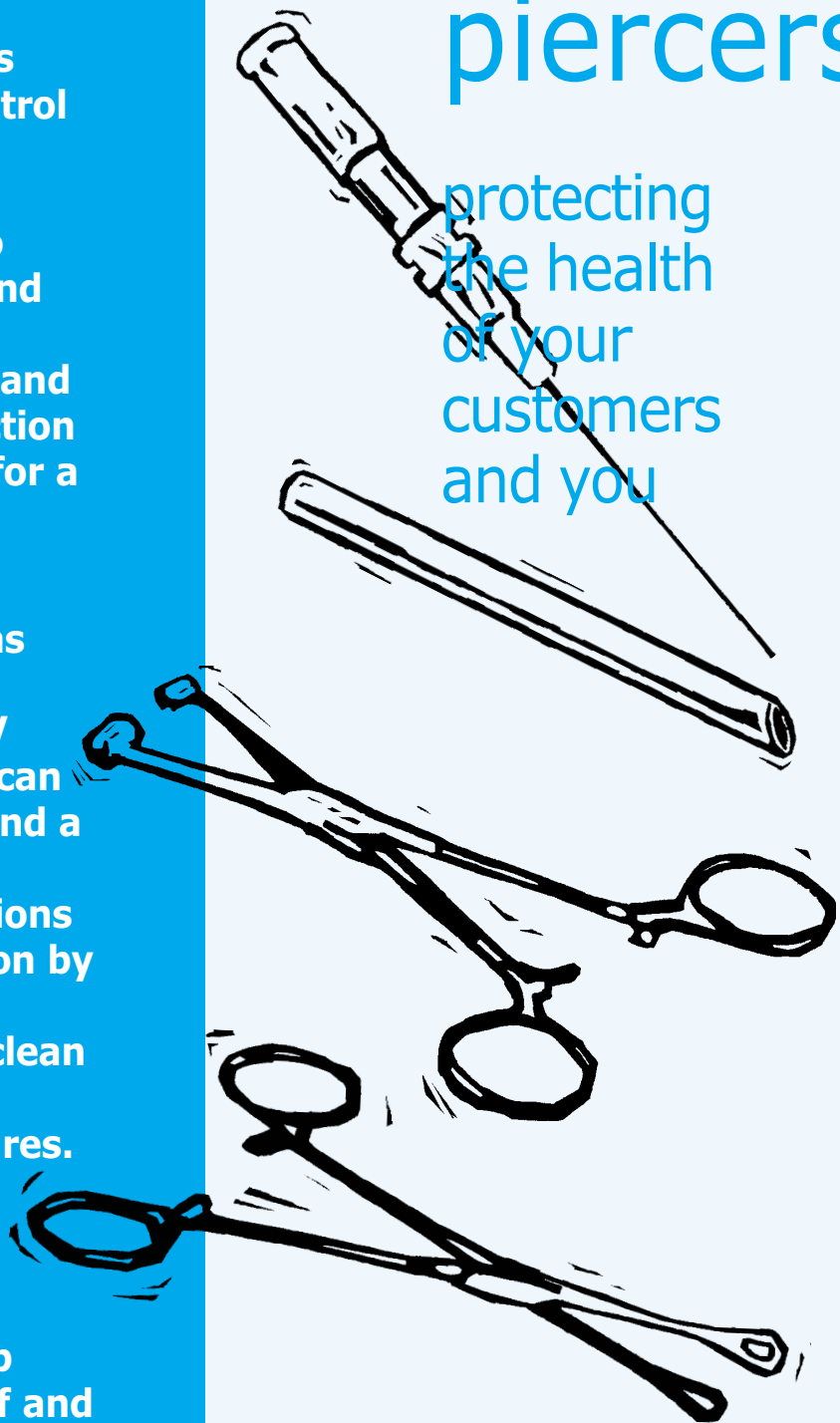
When performing a piercing there is a chance that a disease or infection can be passed among customers. A piercer who follows all steps in infection control can reduce the risk of disease transmission to the customer and the piercer. Understanding and practising infection control is vital for a safe piercing.

Blood borne diseases such as hepatitis C, hepatitis B, HIV (the virus that can lead to AIDS) and a whole range of bacterial infections can be passed on by contaminated equipment, unclean premises and unsafe procedures.

This booklet describes basic steps you can take to help protect yourself and your customers against disease.

# hygienic procedures for **Body piercers**

protecting  
the health  
of your  
customers  
and you



# How infections happen



Transmission of viruses such as hepatitis C, hepatitis B, HIV and common bacteria such as staphylococcus can cause infections when contaminated instruments penetrate the skin or come into contact with mucous membranes.

Disposable needles used in body piercing are for single use only and should be discarded in a suitable sharps container after use. Other instruments, which penetrate the skin, can become contaminated by body fluids if they are not thoroughly cleaned and sterilised. Diseases can be passed on from customer to customer, or to piercers who accidentally prick themselves with contaminated (carrying infected body fluids) instruments.

Poor infection control knowledge and the practices of body piercers can contribute to disease transmission.

This includes:

- poor personal hygiene of the operator
- poor technique eg. where sterile instruments and clean materials are contaminated before they are used on a customer
- poor cleaning, disinfection and sterilising practices
- sterilising and cleaning equipment not regularly checked and maintained for proper operation
- the working environment not kept in good condition to allow proper cleaning (floors, ceilings, walls, bench, furniture surfaces).

## Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is easily transmitted via blood such as that found on needles used in piercing procedures. It can result in long term illness and can result in liver damage, and cancer of the liver. At this stage there is no known cure for hepatitis C and there is no preventive vaccine. Hepatitis C is the most common of the blood borne viruses spread by contaminated instruments.

## Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B can also result in long term illness including liver damage and liver cancer. Hepatitis B can be transmitted via infected blood such as that found on needles used in piercing procedures. A safe effective vaccine is available and a course of three injections will provide full protection to most people. A blood test will show whether a person is protected.

## HIV

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that results in AIDS. HIV can be transmitted via blood through used needles for piercing as well as through unprotected sex with an infected person. At present there is no vaccine against HIV/AIDS and no cure. Safe and hygienic practices are the best prevention.

## Bacterial infections

Common bacteria including staphylococcus and streptococcus can cause infections. The infection can be serious or minor. If an infection results, unhygienic practices of the piercer and the customer are likely causes. Toxic shock syndrome and deformed piercing sites are examples of serious outcomes.

# Basic steps to hygienic, healthy piercing



# Hygienic procedures for piercing

## Preparation of work area

- Wash your hands using liquid hand soap and running water.
- Ensure the work area and working surfaces are clean and tidy.
- Set up the work area ensuring all items required for skin preparation, piercing and waste disposal are available and within easy reach.
- Ensure there is a sharps container provided to safely dispose of sharps.
- Cover any work surfaces, which may come into contact with a customer's bare skin or body fluids, with clean towels or disposable coverings – one per customer.
- Cover surfaces which may need to be touched with a disposable cover eg. power controls, telephone.
- Place a container labelled "contaminated instruments" in each area where piercing takes place.
- Always wear clean clothing including shirt/t-shirt, pants and protective footwear.

## In front of the customer

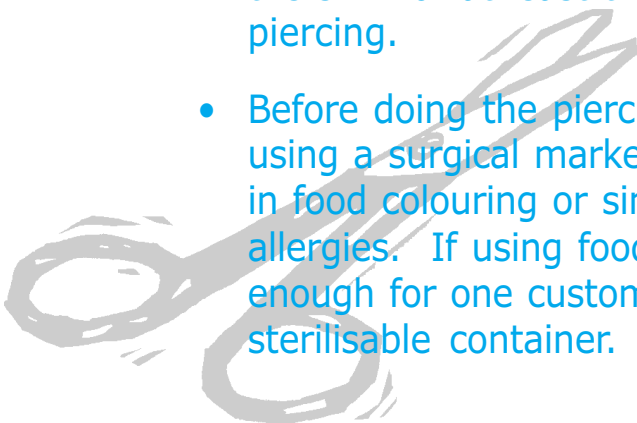
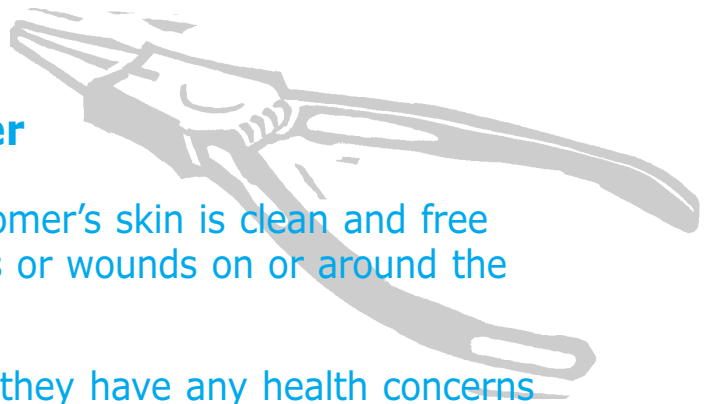
- Remove jewellery, bracelets, watches and rings and thoroughly wash hands using liquid hand soap under

running water. Dry hands using a single-use paper towel or air dryer.

- Place sufficient dressing packs, instrument packs, single-use wipes and selected jewellery for the type of piercing at the individual piercing area.
- Wear clean, new disposable gloves for each customer.

## Preparing your customer

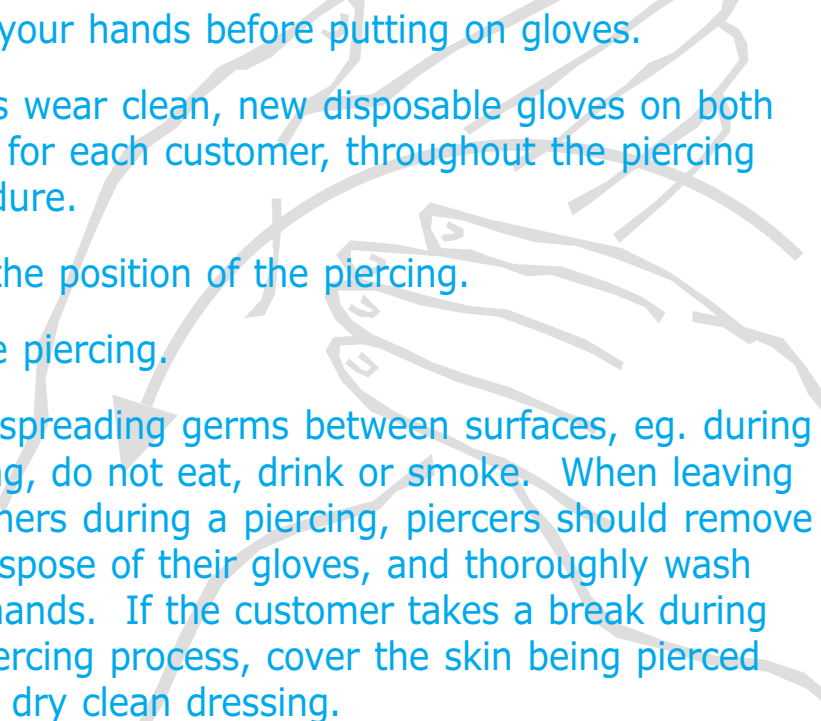
- Check that the customer's skin is clean and free from infection, sores or wounds on or around the piercing site.
- Ask the customer if they have any health concerns which may be affected by having a piercing done, eg. allergies, keloid scarring.
- If the piercing site needs to be shaved, use a new, disposable safety razor for each customer.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect the skin using either a single-use alcohol swab or a single-use wipe with skin disinfectant, which has been decanted into a single-use container.
- Rub in and leave the disinfectant or alcohol swab on the skin for at least two minutes to dry before piercing.
- Before doing the piercing, mark the piercing site using a surgical marker or a clean toothpick dipped in food colouring or similar. Check for food colouring allergies. If using food colouring or similar, decant enough for one customer into a disposable or sterilisable container.

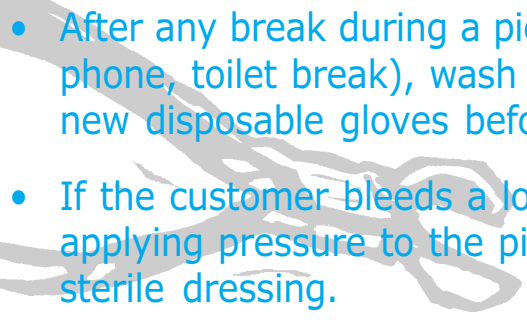


## Before piercing

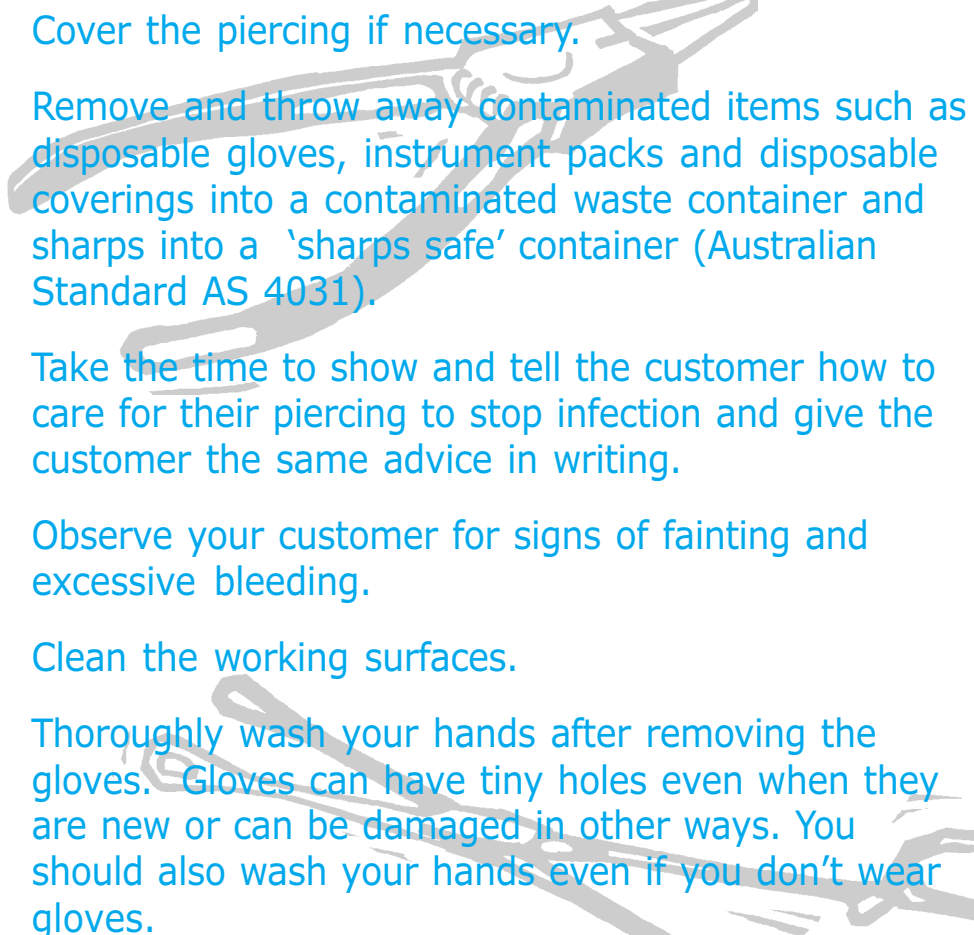
- Check the autoclave bag indicator colour for the required colour change. **Note** — Proper validation of steam sterilisation is a complex issue outside the scope of this booklet. Australian Standard AS 4187 provides further information.
- Check the autoclave bags for tears or other damage. If the bag is damaged or torn, clean and sterilise the items again.
- Open autoclave bags containing single use instruments, jewellery, hardware and other necessary sterilised items in front of your customer.
- Inspect all needles and catheters for defects. Never test them for sharpness on any person's skin.

## During piercing

- Wash your hands before putting on gloves.
  - Always wear clean, new disposable gloves on both hands for each customer, throughout the piercing procedure.
  - Mark the position of the piercing.
  - Do the piercing.
  - Avoid spreading germs between surfaces, eg. during piercing, do not eat, drink or smoke. When leaving customers during a piercing, piercers should remove and dispose of their gloves, and thoroughly wash their hands. If the customer takes a break during the piercing process, cover the skin being pierced with a dry clean dressing.
- 

- 
- After any break during a piercing (eg. answering the phone, toilet break), wash your hands and put on new disposable gloves before piercing again.
  - If the customer bleeds a lot, control the bleeding by applying pressure to the piercing site with a dry sterile dressing.
  - If there is bleeding, handle contaminated items carefully to reduce contact with blood and body fluids.

## After piercing

- 
- Cover the piercing if necessary.
  - Remove and throw away contaminated items such as disposable gloves, instrument packs and disposable coverings into a contaminated waste container and sharps into a 'sharps safe' container (Australian Standard AS 4031).
  - Take the time to show and tell the customer how to care for their piercing to stop infection and give the customer the same advice in writing.
  - Observe your customer for signs of fainting and excessive bleeding.
  - Clean the working surfaces.
  - Thoroughly wash your hands after removing the gloves. Gloves can have tiny holes even when they are new or can be damaged in other ways. You should also wash your hands even if you don't wear gloves.

# Management of blood or body fluid spills

## Small spills

In the case of blood or body fluid spills wipe up the spill with absorbent material.

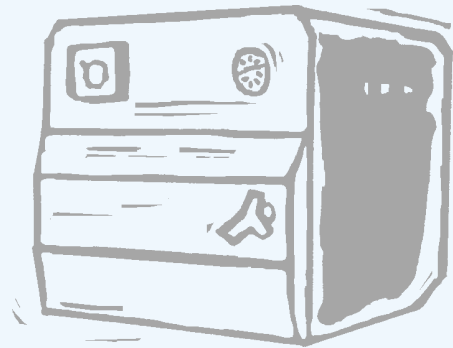
The surface should be cleaned with detergent and warm water and then be left in contact for 10 minutes with cottonwool or disposable towels soaked with a chlorine based disinfectant, approximately one part liquid household bleach to 10 parts water, freshly diluted.

Disposable gloves and protective clothing should be worn and all soiled materials placed in a suitable waste container to await disposal.

## Spot cleaning

Wipe up the spot with absorbent material and then clean the surface with detergent and warm water.

# Routine cleaning & disinfection & sterilisation

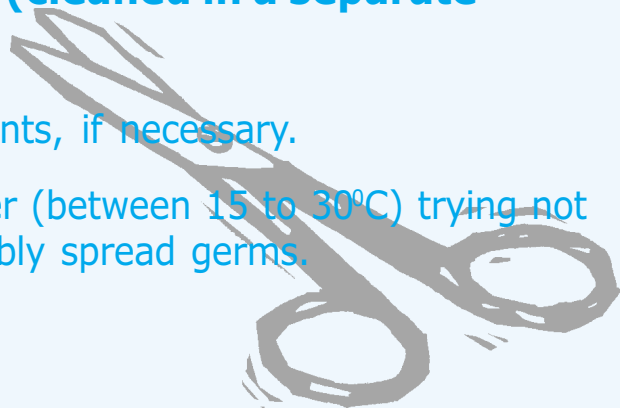


## **Benches, chairs and other work surfaces**

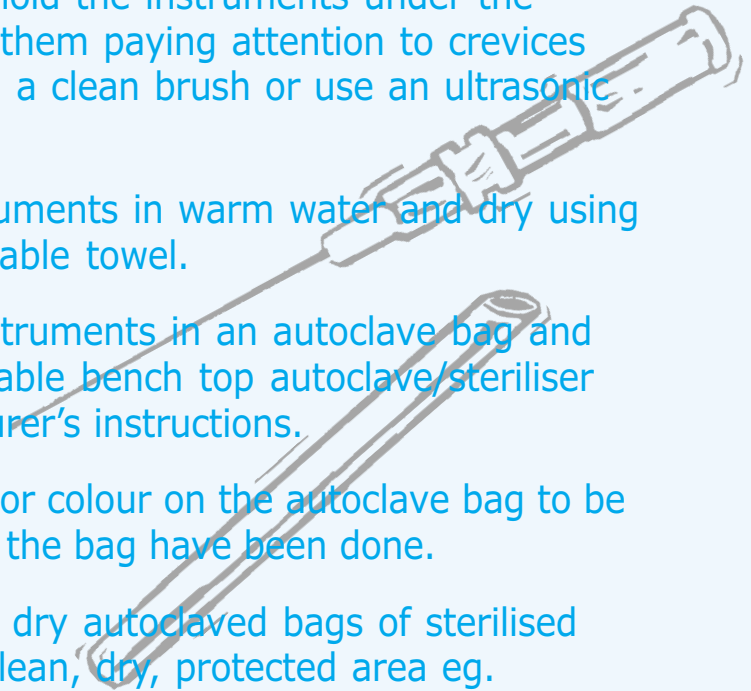
When cleaning; wash with detergent and warm water, rinse with clean water and dry with a clean disposable wipe or allow to air dry. A surface disinfectant can be used in addition.

## **Re-usable instruments (cleaned in a separate cleaning area)**

- Dismantle instruments, if necessary.
- Rinse in warm water (between 15 to 30°C) trying not to splash and possibly spread germs.



- In a sink put instruments in warm water and detergent, then hold the instruments under the water and scrub them paying attention to crevices and grooves with a clean brush or use an ultrasonic cleaner.
- Rinse clean instruments in warm water and dry using a lint-free disposable towel.
- Place cleaned instruments in an autoclave bag and sterilise in a suitable bench top autoclave/steriliser as per manufacturer's instructions.
- Check the indicator colour on the autoclave bag to be sure the items in the bag have been done.
- Store sealed and dry autoclaved bags of sterilised equipment in a clean, dry, protected area eg. cupboard. Mark the bags with the date of autoclaving for future reference.
- Do not open bags until instruments are needed for use.



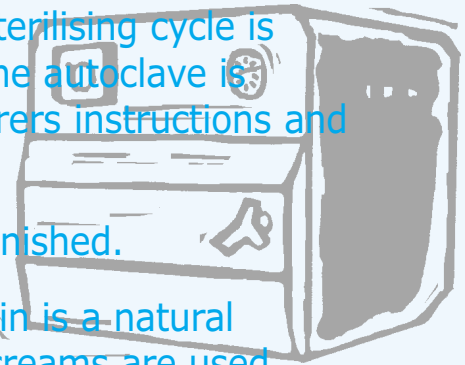
## **Clothes and other washable materials**

- Wash with soap or detergent in water.
- Rinse and dry.
- A commercial laundry could be used.
- Store in a clean, appropriate area like a closed cupboard.



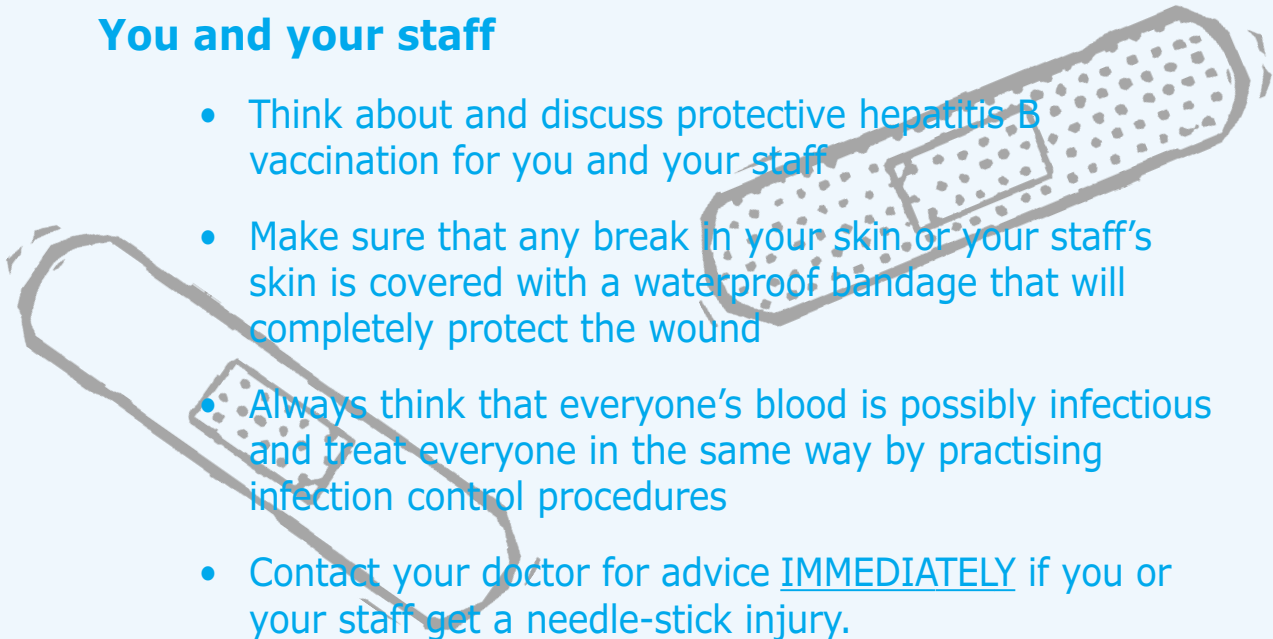
## At the end of the day and as required

- Clean the hand basins, sinks and floors with detergent and warm water.
- Throw all contaminated materials into a waste container or sharps safe' container for disposal.
- It is suggested that the autoclave sterilising cycle is checked for correct operation and the autoclave is maintained according to manufacturers instructions and current Australian Standard 4187.
- Wash your hands after cleaning is finished.
- Hand care is important, as intact skin is a natural defence against infection. If hand creams are used, check the compatibility of the hand cream with the hand-cleaning agent.
- If hand creams are used under gloves, water based preparations are preferred as oil based preparations can cause latex gloves to deteriorate.



## You and your staff

- Think about and discuss protective hepatitis B vaccination for you and your staff
- Make sure that any break in your skin or your staff's skin is covered with a waterproof bandage that will completely protect the wound
- Always think that everyone's blood is possibly infectious and treat everyone in the same way by practising infection control procedures
- Contact your doctor for advice IMMEDIATELY if you or your staff get a needle-stick injury.



# Preventing disease is good for everyone

Following safe procedures is good for your business, reputation, your customers, yourself and your staff.

As a business operator, under Occupational Health and Safety legislation, you have a responsibility to ensure that your workplace is safe and hygienic and your employee piercers are given a chance to learn and practice proper infection control procedures.

Piercers may pierce or injure their own skin while piercing a customer. The transfer of even invisible amounts of your blood into a piercing provides a risk of infecting the customer if you are infected with HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Piercers who are HIV or hepatitis C antibody positive, or who are hepatitis B carriers are asked to think seriously whether they should continue to do oral piercings, as you can injure your hands inside the mouth and allow blood to enter the client's mouth. All piercers regardless of their antibody status should not continue with a piercing if the equipment has pierced/injured their own skin. They must stop and use new, sterile equipment.

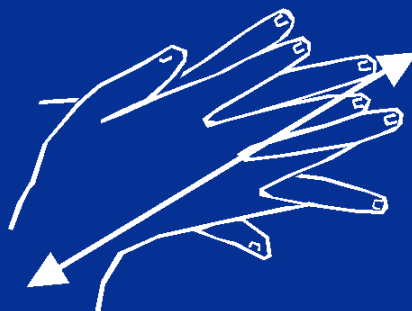
## State legislation

Piercers should refer to current State and Territory Health regulations for information about legal skin penetration requirements that apply to body piercing.

# A blueprint for hand washing



1. Wet hands and forearms



2. Right palm over left, left over right



3. Palm to palm fingers interlaced



4. Back of fingers to opposing fingers interlocked



5. Rotational rubbing of right thumb clasped in left palm and vice versa



6. Rotational rubbing backwards and forwards with tips of fingers and thumb of right hand in left and vice versa

