

Hepatitis factsheet: Tattooing and Piercing



For more information about anything in this factsheet, phone the *Hepatitis Infoline* on 1800 803 990 or go to www.hep.org.au

Introduction

Many people think that the hardest decisions about having tattoos or piercings are the design and colour – and where they should go. **DANGER!** 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).

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 hep C or hep B infection or reinfection – due to a high prevalence of infections 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 *Hepatitis Infoline*.

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
- see if you can watch someone else being tattooed or pierced.

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
- the body artist explains everything to the client.

Also see the *NSW Guidelines on Skin Penetration*

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/skinpenetration/Pages/default.aspx>

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This factsheet was developed by Hepatitis NSW. It was reviewed by the Hepatitis NSW Medical and Research Advisory Panel.

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