



Internet photos

SAFE TATTOOING

## Tattoos

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Far more people than you think have tattoos. Whether you are just thinking about it or have already committed to an appointment to get one, being aware of safety or health risks is important. You are correct however in your hesitancy because tattooing does present some risks. Some of these health risks are:

- You can get HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C from tattooing if certain procedures are not followed.
- If you are going to get a tattoo, it is important that the tools are clean and sterilized (autoclave or chemical).
- Tattoos differ from most fads in that they cannot be simply changed when trends or tastes change.
- Of utmost concern is the spread of blood borne diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C although this is probably low.

Getting correct information is the first step to being aware of your health risks. The first fact that you need to know is that avoidance of tattooing is the more effective way of preventing potential health concerns.

Once the decision has been made to get a tattoo, it is important that the information for protection is accurate. There are a lot of myths. It is important to take the time to educate yourself first on the facts. The Department of Health has strict guidelines for tattoo artists and tattoo establishments.

What should you look for when considering getting a tattoo “safely”?

### **LOOK FOR A SHOP WITH THE FOLLOWING:**

- Counters and work surfaces that are wiped down with disinfectants between customers.
- A tabletop autoclave (big sterilizing oven) that is in use, not just there for show.
- Proper handling procedures for sterilized articles after autoclaving so that they do not become contaminated.

- Appropriate procedures for prepping the skin and disposing of razors.
- Disposable, single use, sterilized needles.
- Heavy plastic container for disposal of used needles and razors.
- Single use, disposable ink (capsules) that can be discarded after use.
- Tubes (the cylinders that the needles move through during the tattooing process) scrubbed inside prior to autoclaving.
- Wooden disposable depressors for use so that the artist doesn't place his or her fingers into a common container for creams or other ointments.
- An artist who wears disposable gloves and properly disposes of them.
- An artist who covers the tattoo with a sterile dressing or bandage immediately after completion.
- An artist that provides information about tattoo care.

To get A TATTOO OR NOT?, the choice is ultimately yours. Here is a tip when you are making your decision: try to observe the tattoo process on another customer to see that they are following the above guidelines. It is important to educate yourself and protect yourself. Remember, the first and most important step is being informed accurately in order to make healthy decisions.

If you want more information on tattooing, contact the Department of Health, visit the Nurse/Educator at the Student Health Centre.

### **Did you know?**

- There is minimal risk of contracting HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C if the procedure is done properly.
- Tattoos may be a problem among young adults. The tattoo may have been applied as a result of a dare, peer pressure, or gang participation.
- Keloids (thick scars) can form on the tattoo.

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1. The Department of Health, "Safe Tattooing".
2. Neinstein, Lawrence S. MD., Adolescent Health Care, A Practical Guide (third edition). Paris: Williams & Wilkins 1996.

For more information, contact the Nurse/Educator at the Student Health Centre at 364-2163.