



Safe practices for tattooing and body piercing

Unsafe skin penetration procedures have the potential to spread deadly viruses such as hepatitis and HIV. If you are considering having a tattoo or piercing make sure you are well informed about safe techniques and choose operators and premises that are clean and professional.

Protect yourself and your clients

Most professional tattooists and body piercers are aware of the potential risks involved in their procedures and take care to follow good infection control practices.

The main issues in making these activities safe for the operator and the client are:

- clean premises
- good operator hygiene
- avoiding contamination of instruments and materials
- using correct cleaning, disinfection and sterilisation methods
- safe sharps disposal.

Reducing the risk of infection

- Before and after attending each client, operators must wash and dry hands thoroughly using single use disposable paper towels or a hot-air dryer.
- Operators must wear clean disposable gloves at all times during the procedure.
- Disposable covers (such as plastic wrap) should be used to protect work surfaces.
- All surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned after each client.
- Clean towels and linen must be used for each client.
- Tattooing or piercing equipment must be sterile and should be

presented to the client in its sterile container before use.

- **Pre-sterilised, single use disposable instruments must be used** where possible.
- Reusable equipment must be washed thoroughly to remove all visible blood and other materials prior to disinfection or sterilisation.
- Use by dates for disinfectants should be checked regularly.
- An autoclave is the preferred method of sterilisation for reusable equipment.
- Sterile equipment must be handled using sterile forceps.
- Sterile equipment should never come into contact with used instruments or unclean surfaces.
- Ointments & dyes must be measured into single use, disposable containers for each client and applied with single-use applicators.
- Only clean, intact skin should be pierced or tattooed.
- Skin must be swabbed with chlorhexidine or 70% alcohol and allowed to dry for at least 60 seconds before penetration.
- If the area needs to be shaved, a disposable razor must be used.
- If bleeding occurs, the client should be asked to apply gentle pressure with a clean dressing and the area



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disinfected with an antiseptic such as povidone.

Needle stick injuries

- If a used needle/sharp accidentally pierces the operator or client's skin, wash the area with soap and water or an alcohol based hand rinse if water is unavailable.
- If eyes are splashed with blood, hold the eye open and rinse thoroughly with water or saline.
- If blood gets into the mouth, spit it out then rinse the mouth out several times.
- **Seek medical advice.** Place the needle/sharp in a rigid walled container and take it to the GP.
- Record the incident including the date and time of the incident and the name of the source.

Waste disposal

- Used dressings and swabs must be placed into a lined waste bin.
- Used sharps must be placed into an approved sharps container that is rigid, leak proof, puncture resistant and shatter proof with a tight fitting lid (as recommended by Australian Standard AS4031).
- Used sharps must not be replaced into their original container or packaging.
- Waste contractors can supply and exchange sharps disposal units or, in some areas, the local council has a sharps container exchange program.

General recommendations

- A record must be kept of each procedure including the date and time.
- All operators should be vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Body piercing

Piercing guns

- Piercing guns are commonly used to pierce the ear lobe.
- Guns using pre-sterilised studs and butterflies with protective disposable fittings are preferable as there is no direct contact of the gun with the client's skin.
- After every use, the gun must be wiped over with 70% alcohol, or another suitable disinfectant.
- *Piercing guns must be used only as recommended by the manufacturer.*

Catheter needle

- The catheter needle is a pre-sterilised needle in thin plastic tubing, used for piercing all areas of the body.
- The needle is passed through the skin and withdrawn leaving only the tube in place. A sterile stud or ring is then inserted into the tube and the tube withdrawn. Care should be taken to ensure minimal handling of the jewellery.
- The needle and tubing must be disposed of immediately after use into a suitable sharps container.
- A new sterile needle must be used for each client.
- Piercing methods involving direct contact with the client's skin (such as trocar and cannula) are **not recommended**.

Jewellery

- Jewellery used in body piercing must be made of materials that can be sterilised by autoclaving before insertion, for example surgical steel and gold.
- Jewellery must also be suitable for the area pierced, for example gemstones and some gold or silver alloy bead rings are not suitable for genital piercing.

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- The client should be shown the piercing jewellery in its sterilised package before use.

For more client information about body piercing, refer to the Child and Youth Health web site, Youth Health Information, or the guideline listed below.

Tattooing

It is an offence to tattoo a person under the age of 18 years.

Handpieces, nozzles and needles

After every use:

- the nozzle, needle bar, tubes and reusable needles must be cleaned and sterilised using a bench top autoclave
- disposable needles must be disposed of into a sharps container
- the handpiece must be cleaned and disinfected using 70% alcohol.

All re-usable instruments must be washed thoroughly to remove all visible blood and other materials as soon as possible after use and before disinfection or sterilisation.

Instruments and needles must not be stored in disinfectant.

A new sterile needle must be used for each client.

Use of screens and pigments

Stencil patterns or templates must be used only once and then discarded. Creams and pigments must be served into single use disposable containers for each client.

Stick deodorant is sometimes used to 'seal' the tattoo to prevent seepage.

Single use spatulas must be used to apply creams, lubricating jelly or deodorant.

Multi use, roll on or stick deodorants should not be applied directly to the skin.

Further information

- Your Medical Practitioner
- Your local council Environmental Health Officer
- Drug and Alcohol Services Council (DASC) - Ph: (08) 8274-3382
- Refer to our fact sheet 'Handling blood and other body substances' available on our website at: www.dh.sa.gov.au/pehs/youve-got-what.htm
- information on infection control and legal requirements for operators in the body piercing and tattoo industries, can be found in the Department of Health document 'Guidelines on the safe and hygienic practice of skin penetration' available on our website at: www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environ-health-index.htm.

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