

# Tattooing and Piercing - Get Good Clean Art

Body Art has continued to be a popular form of personal expression. Despite its popularity and long history, the choice to get a tattoo or piercing is not risk-free. It is important to understand the risks and take precautions to protect yourself. If you want the work done, it's worth getting it done right. It's your body and your health.

## What are the risks?

**Blood-borne infections:** If the equipment used is contaminated with blood from an infected person, you could contract hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV.

**Skin infections:** Bacteria thrive on the skin and both tattooing and piercing break the skin's protective barrier. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has linked clusters of potentially serious antibiotic-resistant skin infections to work done by unlicensed tattoo artists who didn't follow proper infection control procedures.

**Skin disorders:** Both tattooing and piercing can cause scars and keloids (raised bumps of scar tissue).

**Allergic reactions:** Some tattoo dyes, and piercing jewelry made of nickel or brass can cause allergic reactions.

## Be a smart consumer. -----Take your time. Think about it.

- ✓ **Go to an Expert Artist in an Inspected Shop**  
Never allow friends to persuade you to save money by having a piercing or tattooing done at home or at a party. A tattoo or piercing done without the proper equipment in an environment that has not been inspected can increase your risk of blood-borne or skin infections.
- ✓ **Ask Questions** - Make sure the artist has made infection control a priority. Write down a list of questions and bring them with you when you interview the tattoo or piercing artist. An informed and safe artist won't be offended or upset by your concerns and will have answers and explanations ready.
- ✓ **Do a Self-assessment**  
Do you have a skin condition or allergy that could interfere with healing and leave you open to a skin infection. If you have any doubt, talk with your doctor.
- ✓ **Shop Around**  
You are purchasing a product that cannot be returned or exchanged. Visit different shops. Ask for recommendations.
- ✓ **Trust Your Instincts**  
If you feel uncomfortable about anything in the shop, go somewhere else.

[www.healthunit.com](http://www.healthunit.com)

Here's a checklist of what the artist must provide for your safety:

❑ **Clean Hands**

Make sure the artist washes his/her hands thoroughly with soap and water and puts on single-use disposable gloves before beginning the procedure. Make sure the artist washes his hands and puts on a new pair of gloves if he is interrupted to answer the phone or deal with another matter.

❑ **New Sterile Needles**

All needles, for tattooing or piercing, must be brand new and sterile. Make sure the artist breaks the seal in front of you. Never allow a needle that has been used or that you suspect has been used before to enter your skin for any reason at any time.

❑ **Clean and Sterilized Equipment**

Equipment that touches your skin but does not actually break it can be reused after it is properly cleaned and sterilized. This includes things like the needle bars or rods that support the needle in a tattoo machine, forceps, and scissors. Proper sterilization is done in an autoclave (steam under pressure). Ask the artist what procedures he/she uses to do this.

❑ **Clean Skin**

Make sure the artist cleans your skin with soap and water and disinfects the area with an antiseptic before the decorating procedure. If shaving is necessary, insist that the artist use a fresh, disposable razor.

❑ **No Double Dipping**

Make sure that the artist pours the ink for your tattoo into small, disposable containers that have not been used before. Also make sure that the artist discards the container after he completes your tattoo.

❑ **Quality Jewelry**

Metal is an important part in body piercing. Choose high-grade sterile surgical steel or gold because other metals can cause allergic reactions.

❑ **Gun Control**

Ear piercing guns are to be used on ear lobes only, they are not suitable for piercing other body parts. Make sure that the artist uses a sterile needle to pierce your body.

❑ **After Care Instructions**

The artist should provide you with written and verbal instructions on how to take care of your tattoo or piercing until it heals. Follow all the guidelines carefully to avoid infections. See your doctor if the area becomes infected.

For more information contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at  
519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to [www.healthunit.com](http://www.healthunit.com)

Source:

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2009). *Infection prevention and control best practices for personal services settings*. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubhealth/oph\\_standards/ophs/progstds/pdfs/pssp\\_2008.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubhealth/oph_standards/ophs/progstds/pdfs/pssp_2008.pdf)

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