

Needles can spread HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and other germs. Thousands of people in Canada have been infected with HIV, Hep B and Hep C from sharing needles for injection drug use. Sharing tattoo and piercing needles can spread infections, too. Although tattoos and piercings are popular, there are risks when they are done at home, on the street or in prison. Professional tattoo artists and piercers know how to prevent the spread of infections through body art. This brochure has some tips to help you find a professional artist who will look after your health while giving you the piercing or tattoo you want.

What To Look For Before Getting A Tattoo

In Canada today, there is almost no risk of getting HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C from a **professional** tattoo artist. **But it is up to the customer to find an artist who follows safe practices!** Before getting a tattoo, make sure the artist follows these practices:

- The needles used to apply the tattoo should be new and sterile, and they should stay in sealed packages until the artist is ready to use them. Needles should be thrown away in a sharps container after they've been used.

- Only the needles pierce the skin, but other instruments should be cleaned, sterilized or disinfected before each use. Tattoo studios should have a working autoclave, which uses heat and pressure to sterilize instruments.

- The tattoo artist should not test the tattoo needles or ink on his or her own skin. This could spread viruses or bacteria.

- Before tattooing a client, the artist should shave the client's skin with a new, disposable razor. This razor should then be thrown away. Using the same razor on different clients might spread viruses or bacteria.



- The person giving the tattoo should have good hygiene, wash his/her hands before working on a client and should always wear single-use medical gloves. The tattoo artist should never smoke while working.

- Before the tattoo is applied, lubricants are used to moisten the skin.

Excessive lubricant should not be returned to the main supply. It should be wiped off the skin and thrown away.

- The ink used during the tattooing should be taken from the main supply and placed in a small, disposable container or 'cap.' The artist should not use home-made ink; commercially produced ink is the best. Any ink left in the cap when the tattoo is finished should be thrown away. Returning used ink to the main supply could spread viruses or bacteria.

- The studio itself should always be clean and any surfaces that come into contact with a client's blood should be disinfected. Bleach or a hospital strength disinfectant should be used to clean up any blood spills.



What To Look For Before Getting A Piercing

As with tattoos, a body piercing is safe when done by a qualified professional. However, **it is up to you** to choose a piercing artist who knows how to protect your health! Look for the following practices before getting a piercing:

- All needles should be new and sterile. They should be left in sealed packages until it is time to use them. Each piercing should be done with a new needle, even when the same person is getting multiple piercings.

- The piercer should throw away used needles right after doing the piercing. Used needles should go in a sharps container, not the garbage.

- Insertion tapers, forceps, needle receiving tubes and the pliers used to open and close piercing rings should be cleaned and sterilized between each use. Cleaning should be done with warm water and detergent to remove blood, skin and hair. The instruments should then be sterilized in an autoclave.

- The skin should be cleaned with an antiseptic before and after the piercing. Soap and water, alcohol and sprays are not strong enough!

- The person giving the piercing should have good hygiene, wash his/

her hands before working on a client, and should always wear single-use medical gloves. The piercer should never smoke while working.

- Only sterilized jewellery should be worn in a fresh piercing.

Acrylic, bone and horn can't be sterilized well enough, and could cause skin infections in a new piercing.

- If the piercing will go through the lips or tongue, the customer should rinse with an anti-bacterial mouthwash right before getting the piercing.

- The studio itself should always be clean and any surfaces that come into contact with a client's blood should be disinfected with bleach or a hospital strength disinfectant.

Getting Body Art Done Safely

Ask if the studio is inspected by the local health board and look for a business licence. This is sign that the artist is a professional.



Tattoos and Piercings At Home: Body art can be expensive, so some people get their tattoos or piercings done by friends. This is dangerous! You wouldn't ask a friend to perform surgery on you at home, right? Why take risks when getting body art? A professional body artist, who knows how to protect your health, will be worth your time and money.

After getting body art

Ask the artist for a list of instructions on how to care for the tattoo or piercing. It is important to follow those instructions so the tattoo or piercing doesn't become infected or ruined by poor care.

Tips for taking care of a new tattoo or piercing

- Don't pick at any scabs that form on the tattoo or piercing.
- If the tattooing or piercing site becomes infected, it must be treated by a doctor.
- Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun for about a month.
- Avoid swimming pools and hot tubs for at least a week.

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The Risks

Hepatitis B: This disease is spread by a virus that can live in semen, vaginal fluids and saliva as well as in a person's blood. Hep B can cause jaundice, which turns a person's eyes and skin yellow. It can also leave an infected person feeling tired or even cause liver cancer.

There is an immunization for Hepatitis B, and there are treatments for infected people.

Hepatitis C: This disease is spread by a virus that lives in an infected person's blood. Someone with Hep C can suffer from cirrhosis (sir-OH-sis), which is a scarring of the liver that makes it hard to clean toxins out of the blood. Some people with Hep C also develop liver cancer. A quarter of a million people in Canada have Hepatitis C, but only about 30% of them know they are infected.

There is no immunization for Hepatitis C, but there are treatments for infected people.

HIV: The Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). People infected with HIV lose their ability to fight off infections and sicknesses. This virus can spread when infected blood enters an uninfected person's bloodstream, which often happens when people share needles for injecting drugs. HIV can also be transmitted during sex by an infected person's semen or vaginal fluids.

There is no cure or immunization for HIV, but there are medications that can help an infected person live longer.

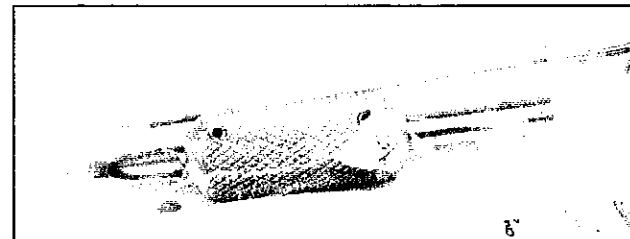
Heads Up

Since tattoo and piercing needles puncture the skin, they can pick up viruses from an infected person. If a dirty needle is re-used, it can spread Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV or other infections. For that reason, tattoos or piercings done with poorly cleaned instruments can be dangerous! It is best to get your body art done by a professional body artist who knows how to take care of your health.

Soap and water, sprays or pressure cookers won't sterilize tattoo and piercing instruments. Neither will soaking them in chemicals. Instruments should be cleaned and sterilized in an autoclave, which uses heat and pressure to kill germs. If you have doubts about a studio's cleaning practices, it is OK if you ask to see their autoclave.

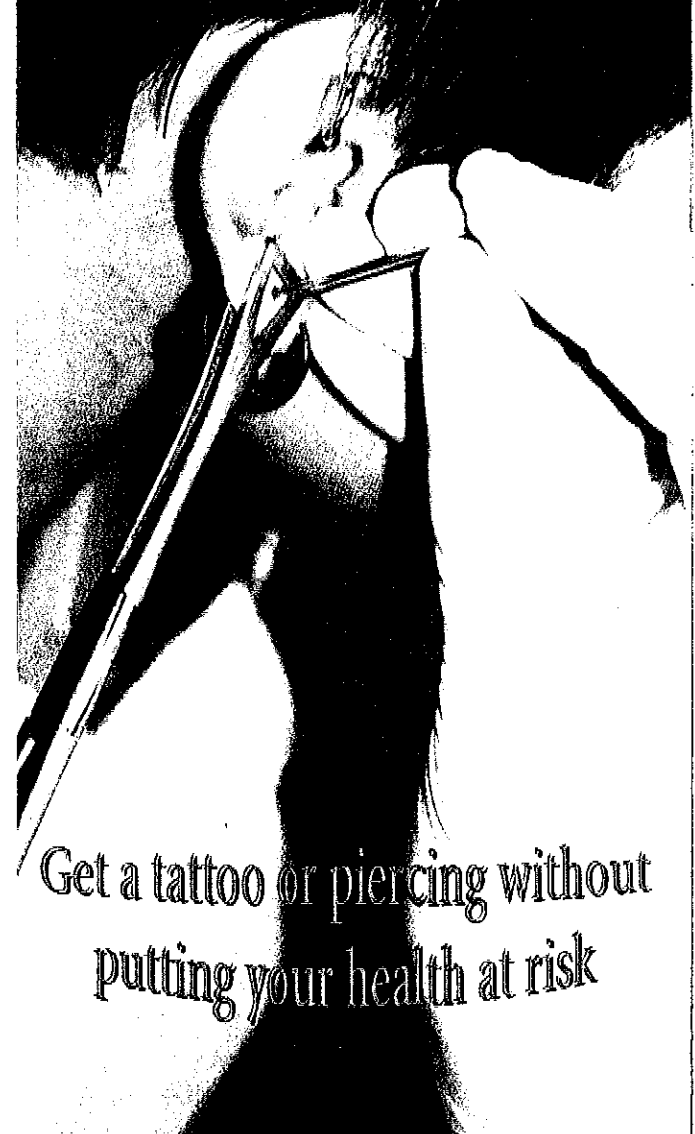
Tattoo and piercing studios should be clean, and should never have pets, smoking, alcohol or drugs in them. If an artist can't even keep his or her studio clean, then what kind of body art can you expect from that person? If in doubt, just walk out.

NEVER get body art while you're drunk or high - you may regret it later on!



Instruments, such as this tattoo needle grip, should be sterilized and sealed after each use.

Safer Body Art



Get a tattoo or piercing without
putting your health at risk