

Tattooing – Client health information

So you are thinking about getting a tattoo?

In Victoria it is against the law to tattoo any person under the age of 18 years. If you are over 18 years of age the decision to get a tattoo is your personal choice. But remember a tattoo is a lifelong change to your body image. Some tattoos can be surgically removed, but this is expensive, time consuming, and sometimes leaves scarring.

Risks

Contaminated equipment, unclean premises and unsafe procedures all have the potential to spread diseases such as hepatitis, HIV and bacterial infections. Good tattooists will be happy to discuss their hygiene procedures with you.

Go to a registered shop

Make sure that the tattooist you plan to use is registered with their local council. A 'certificate of registration' should be available for viewing.

To comply with health regulations:

- The shop must be clean and hygienic.
- Instruments used to pierce the skin must be sterilised.
- The operator should not have exposed cuts or wounds and presents in clean condition.

What to look for

- Ask the tattooist if they use sterile or new equipment each time. If they reuse, how do they sterilise their equipment?
- That new disposable gloves are worn for each client.
- That new ink containers are used for each client.
- Your questions are answered and you feel comfortable having the procedure done.

After care instructions

- Listen to and follow the advice given by the tattooist.
- Two to three hours after being tattooed, wash the tattoo in clean, warm running water using mild soap. Rinse thoroughly and pat dry.
- Do not rub, pick or scratch at a new tattoo as this will slow healing time and may lead to secondary infections.
- After the initial bleeding of the tattoo has stopped, do not reapply bandage.
- Avoid swimming in chlorinated or salt water until healed. If in frequent contact with water use a barrier cream over the tattoo until healed.
- Only use creams recommended by the tattooist or pharmacist for healing, but do not overuse.
- When you feel the skin is drying out, apply recommended cream and massage in well. Repeat as necessary to keep the tattoo slightly moist.
- Do not wear tight or dirty clothing over the tattoo.
- Avoid sunbathing, but if you do, apply sunscreen (15 to 30+). This will not only assist in the healing process, but also prevent fading of the tattoo.
- Return to the tattooist as advised or if having problems.
- If the tattooed area becomes excessively irritated, itchy, red or sore, consult your doctor and notify the tattooist.
- Should you have any specific concerns about the procedure, contact your Local Council Health Department.

Cosmetic tattooing

Aside from traditional tattooing where people have a design applied to their skin, there is a procedure called cosmetic tattooing (also known as pigment implantation, semipermanent creation, permanent make up, derma-impigmentation and micropigmentation). Permanent colour pigment implants are applied around the eyes as an eyeliner, on the eyebrows, as a lipliner or a lip tint. These implants although called permanent last for two to six years, depending on skin type.

These procedures are similar to those involved in other tattooing, and so the same principles apply to the processes. There are specific aftercare requirements for cosmetic tattooing sites that the tattooist should discuss with you.

Tattoo removal

Unwanted tattoos can cause psychological problems, especially if they are easily visible. In the past, tattoo removal almost always led to extensive scarring of the skin. The development of modern lasers means that tattoos (in most cases) can be safely and effectively removed.

As with all medical or surgical treatments, tattoo removal involves some risks:

- In around five per cent of cases, some minor scarring may be seen.
- Some patients also develop some lightening of the skin.

The tattoo will take weeks or months to fade after treatment. Several treatments will be required before the tattoo fades. In general, tattoos applied by a professional tattooist and involving several colours will require more than ten treatments.

Operator requirements

Current best practice guidelines for tattooing recommend that the tattooist should:

- Wash their hands at the beginning and end of the procedure, and whenever there is a need to take a break in the procedure such as answering the phone.
- Always wear single use gloves on both hands for each client and wear them throughout the procedure.
- As far as possible avoid contamination between the work area and the client's blood.
- Not smoke, drink or eat whilst tattooing a client.
- Use sterile equipment. The tattooist should be able to explain how equipment is sterilised and have an autoclave steriliser on the premises, or evidence that the equipment has been sterilised off site.

Further information

For further information please contact the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit on 1300 651 160 or visit the www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas.

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