

Other health issues or concerns to consider before getting a tattoo or body piercing are:

- ◇ You should never cover a mole with a tattoo, because it could turn cancerous without you knowing about it.
- ◇ Tell your doctor or health care provider about any tattoos because some interfere with X-rays. X-rays can burn tattooed areas.
- ◇ Canadian Blood Services refuses donors for one year if they recently received a body piercing or tattoo due to the risk of infection.
- ◇ If you are pregnant or have certain medical conditions, including diabetes, talk to your doctor and tattoo artist before getting a tattoo.

### Further Questions?

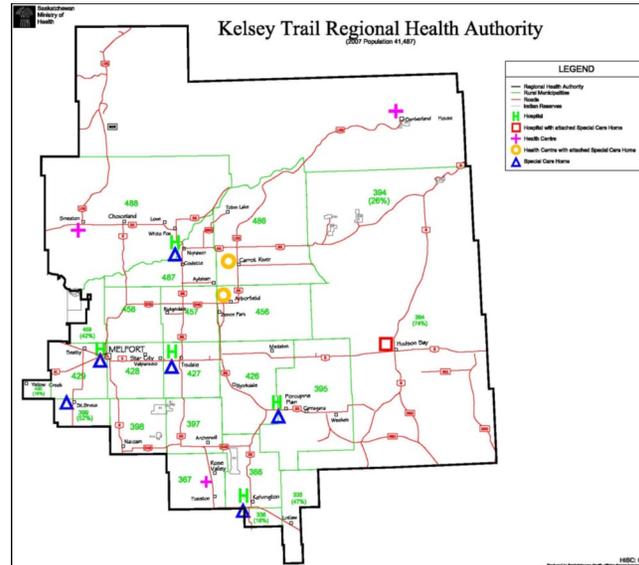
If you have any further questions about the safety of body art, please contact your local public health inspector:

**Melfort/Tisdale Area: 306-752-6310**

**Nipawin Area: 306- 862-7230**

Reference:

Infection Prevention and Control Practices for Personal Services: Tattooing, Ear/Body Piercing and Electrolysis. Health Canada, July 1999



**Public Health Inspection  
is a service of the  
KELSEY TRAIL HEALTH REGION**

*For more information about this or other services  
of the Kelsey Trail Health Region  
contact the Regional Office at  
(306) 873-6600 or visit our website  
[www.kelseytrailhealth.ca](http://www.kelseytrailhealth.ca)*



**Provincial Health Line—24 hour health advice**



**KTHR Quality of Care Coordinator  
1-877-573-6601**



# Body Art - Thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing?



*Healthy People in Healthy Communities*

## Body Art—Yes, It's Safe

Tattooing and body piercing have become very popular. Body art has become accepted within the mainstream public, from high school students to urban professionals.



Tattooing and body piercing are not risk-free but are safer when done by professionals who are careful to protect their customers from infections.

It's tempting to save money and let a relative or friend give you a tattoo or piercing. However, these amateurs (scratchers) rarely take full precautions to protect you from blood diseases such as Hepatitis B and C (severe liver diseases) and HIV (the virus known to cause AIDS). Because needles are used in body art, there is a risk of getting these blood diseases. Other infections that are possible include blood poisoning, staphylococcal and streptococcal infections.

Blood diseases are a real possibility. The Hepatitis virus can survive a long time in the open air. HIV is not as strong, but it is possible to be infected through unsafe body art practices. Body artists must always use single-use sterile needles. To avoid bacterial infections, they must keep their shop clean, and all surfaces and equipment must be cleaned and disinfected.

### What Are The Risks?

Amateur (unsafe) body artists may take some of the following risks:

- ☼ **Re-using needles** - Needles should be used only once and then disposed. Ask to watch your body artist open your packaged, sterilized needle.
- ☼ **Re-using ink** - A virus can survive for some time in ink. Fresh ink should be used for your tattoo. Ask to see your ink poured into new, disposable containers.
- ☼ **Used jewelry** - It is recommended that brand new, sterile, surgical steel jewelry be used for your piercing.

- ☼ **Piercing guns** - These should only be used for ears. Needles should be used for all other piercings.
- ☼ **Dirty shop** - If shop surfaces are not disinfected, there is a possibility of acquiring a variety of bacterial infections.
- ☼ **Allergic reaction**—People may have an allergic reaction to the tattoo dyes. Allergic reactions to red dyes occur more often than other colors.

### Are You Ready?

Now that you know the risks of unsafe body art, go through the following checklist before visiting a body artist:

- ⇒ Are you sure you want the body art? Remember that tattoos are permanent. Think twenty years down the road. Tattoos can sometimes be removed, but the process is painful, long, expensive, can cause scarring and sometimes doesn't work. It costs much more to remove a tattoo than to apply one. The more colors in a tattoo, the more difficult it will be to remove
- ⇒ What will the body art look like and where will it go on your body? It should say something about you (not someone else!)
- ⇒ Tattooing and piercing are painful. Make sure you can handle the pain and discomfort. Tattoos can take a couple of hours to complete.
- ⇒ Choose your body artist carefully. You will be buying a service and have the right to know about the artist's training, experience and sanitation practices. It's important the artist and shop practice good health and safety standards.
- ⇒ Make sure you know of any severe skin allergies you may have, and be sure your skin is clear of cuts and rashes.

### Choosing An Artist

When choosing a body artist, remember the following:

- \*\*Try to get a referral from a trusted friend.
- \*\*Look in the Yellow Pages of the phone book under "Tattooing" or "Body Piercing". This is where you can make your list of artists to visit.
- \*\*See what precautions the artist takes to protect their customers and themselves from infections.
- \*\* Talk to the artist. Tattooing and body piercing is

very personal work, so you should feel comfortable with the artist.

### Shop Inspection

Here are some specific things you should see during your shop inspection:

- Sterilizing machine (called an autoclave). Soaking equipment in chemicals isn't good enough.
- Packaged, sterilized needles and tubes.
- Disposable razors for shaving tattoo area.
- Puncture resistant sharps containers.
- Fresh ink dispensers and disposable ink containers.
- Handwashing sink and clean-up sinks.
- Evidence of health region approval and a business license.
- Clean rooms (no alcohol, drugs or animals).
- Artist's portfolio (pictures of the work they have done for other people). All good artists will have a portfolio.
- Disposable rubber gloves for the artists.
- Labeled disinfecting spray bottles for sanitizing surfaces.

If the artist doesn't want to show you these things or answer your questions, leave and find an artist that will.

### Body Art Care

It's extremely important that you take good care of your tattoo or piercing once you leave the shop. A reputable body artist will provide you with a list of things you must do to prevent infections. Make sure they give you that list and explain it to you before you leave. Here are a few suggestions:

- ◆ Keep the tattoo/piercing area clean (don't use peroxide or alcohol).
- ◆ Avoid swimming pools and hot tubs for at least one week.
- ◆ Do not pick any scabs which form. This is a normal part of the healing process. Picking the scab may lead to infection or damage to your tattoo.
- ◆ If you have any questions during the healing process, contact your artist.
- ◆ Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun until healed (about a month).
- ◆ In case of an infection or allergic reaction to the ink or jewelry, return to the artist, visit your doctor, and if necessary report to your local public health office.