



## Hello there!

The contents of this pack should provide you with some interesting and detailed information about hepatitis C and body art.

This info pack contains a selection of general resources about hepatitis C, as well as some information that specifically addresses body art. Even though the information in this pack talks mostly about body piercing, the health, safety and hygiene information is equally relevant to tattooing.

If you are thinking about body art, make sure you read through this information and take the necessary steps to finding a tattooist or body piercer with the highest standards of hygiene and infection control. This might mean you pay a little bit more, but being safe is worth the effort.

Check out some of the following links for other interesting information on safe body art.

<http://www.bmezine.com/caba/cc95.html>

<http://www.co.boulder.co.us/health/envIRON/pdfs/bodyArtInfo.pdf>

<http://ronjones.org/Handouts/BodyArt.pdf>

... and be sure to check out the Hepatitis C Council of Victoria's website [www.hepcvic.org.au](http://www.hepcvic.org.au) for more info on body art and hepatitis C.

If you have any other questions or would like to discuss anything you read in this info pack, feel free to give the Council a call on 03 9380 4644.

## Good luck!

# Tattooing and body piercing:

## Does it hurt?

That is always the first question. Anyone with visible tattoos or piercings knows how common this question is. Similarly, say body piercers and tattooists, pain is the primary concern of people considering body art. Relatively few people are asking questions about infection control, blood borne viruses (like hepatitis C) and cross-contamination. But we should be. The pain of tattoos and piercings can be sharp and intense, but it passes once the procedure is complete, so long as proper aftercare takes place. But does it hurt? It seems that the question of body art hurting relates to us, and the choices we make as consumers.

## The Tattoo

Tattooing is permanent skin art. We have three layers of skin: epidermis (outermost), dermis (centre) and subcutaneous (deepest). For the ink to be permanent it is injected between the epidermis and the dermis. This process is done by the tattoo gun, whose motor drives a single needle or needle configurations up and down into the skin. The ink is basically punctured into the skin. The number and type of needles depends on the design of the tattoo and whether a tattooist is doing the outline or the shading. During the course of a tattoo the area will bleed and the amount of blood varies from person to person. The tattoo site is akin to a wound, and needs to be appropriately dressed for the first few hours after the procedure, and then cleaned for the duration of the healing period.

## The Pierce

Body piercing is a process by which people are able to have jewellery adorning various parts of their bodies. The area is first pierced with a needle and then the jewellery is inserted. A successful piercing needs to trick the body into not rejecting the jewellery, which is the body's natural response to a foreign object. A piercer needs to have well developed anatomical knowledge to know where can and cannot be pierced, and be able to assess the proposed piercing in terms of: placement (depth and width), correct type and size of jewellery, build up of scar tissue around the piercing, and the timing of antibacterial treatment.

Aftercare is critical to successful body piercing.

## Body art's most unwanted

Hepatitis C is a virus that affects the liver. It is found only in blood and transmitted only through blood. It is a chronic illness, and it can lead to cirrhosis and long term liver damage. The liver is a vital organ which absorbs nutrients from food and breaks down waste products like alcohol and drugs. The Hep C virus is quite strong as viruses go, and, unlike HIV, can live outside the body, sometimes for several days.





## Tattooing, Piercing and Hepatitis C

Next time you are thinking about body art, think about this. Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus, and it is transmitted when infected blood enters the blood stream of another person.

So what are the transmission risks for body art? The instruments and implements (eg needles, clamps, ink and ink pots) used in tattooing and piercing come into contact with blood. Hepatitis C transmission can occur when these instruments are re-used or not fully sterilised. The body artist's hands also come into contact with this blood.

Picture this: you are being tattooed, the studio phone rings, the tattooists picks up the phone, the phone is now blood contaminated. If the phone is not covered in clingwrap or disinfected between clients, this is a clear vehicle for cross contamination. Then there are light switches, lamp stands, door handles... the list goes on. A good body artist - and there are many of these - will be meticulous about infection control, and will be more than happy to explain and demonstrate this to any potential client. Remember, a good operator will not feel threatened by discussing his or her hygiene and infection control procedures.

## Quick advice before getting a tattoo or piercing:

- Make sure the studio is registered with the council
- Ask friends and acquaintances for recommendations
- Meet the body artist in person and discuss design and placement. Take a friend if you like
- Ask the artist about their experience and knowledge of infection control procedures. They should be willing and able to demonstrate this knowledge to you. If they can not, or won't, then go somewhere else.
- Assess the general cleanliness and organisation of the studio. The piercing/ tattooing area should be separate from the main area of the studio, and it should look and feel as clean as the best dentist's surgery.
- If possible observe the artist at work - do they wash hands? Use and replace gloves if interrupted? Open needle packs and other sterile equipment in front of the customer? Clean and sterilise surfaces and equipment between clients?
- For more info contact the Hepatitis C Council of Victoria on 9380 4644 or email any questions to [info@hepcvic.org.au](mailto:info@hepcvic.org.au)

# The Tattoo

## The Principles

For a tattoo to be permanent the ink needs to be deposited between the epidermis and the dermis.

We have three layers of skin -

- The epidermis is the outer layer and contains the cells that produce pigment as well as providing the body's first immune defence mechanism
- The dermis is the centre layer and contains nerve endings sweat and sebaceous glands, blood and lymph vessels
- The subcutaneous layer is the deepest layer and stores fat and collagen.
- The tattoo gun injects ink between the epidermis and the dermis
- A tattoo gun punctures the skin between 1500 to 3500 times per minute.

## The Process

Step 1 - Shave the area:

Tools required - razor (disposable) soap, paper towel.

Step 2 - Area cleaned with antiseptic solution:

Tools required - antiseptic solution, applicator, paper towel.

Step 3 - Gel and transfer:

Tools required - gel, stencil of tattoo, applicator, paper towel.

Step 4 - Set up:

A tattooist will place all the equipment on a tray or work bench - e.g. disposable ink caps filled with the colours of tattoo, packets of needles, the tattoo machine/gun, paper towels, applicators and gloves.

Step 5 - Petroleum Jelly:

Petroleum jelly is applied over the stencil to help the tattoo gun glide over the skin.

Step 6 - Tattoo:

Tools required - tattoo gun, needles, needle tubes, gloves, paper towels, petroleum jelly, applicator, pigment, ink/pigment caps.

Step 7 - Aftercare:

Treat your new tattoo as a delicate wound, avoid direct sunlight, and prolonged exposure to water. Apply an antiseptic cream (Bepanthen) liberally and frequently. Do not pick or scratch the scab that forms.



# A Piercee's Bill of Rights

Every person has the right:

1. To be pierced in a scrupulously hygienic, open environment, by a clean, conscientious piercer wearing a fresh pair of disposable latex gloves.
2. To a sober, friendly, calm and knowledgeable piercer, who will guide them through their piercing experience with confidence and assurance.
3. To the peace of mind which comes from knowing that their piercer knows and practices the very highest standards of sterilisation and hygiene.
4. To be pierced with a brand new, completely sterilised needle, which is immediately disposed of in a medical sharps container after use on the piercee alone.
5. To be touched only with freshly sterilised, appropriate implements, properly used and disposed of or re-sterilised in an autoclave prior to use on anyone else.
6. To know that piercing guns are NEVER appropriate, and are often dangerous, when used on any part of the body, including earlobes, because they cannot be sterilised properly.
7. To be fitted only with jewellery which is appropriately sized, safe in material, design, and construction, and which best promotes healing. Gold-plated, gold-filled, and sterling silver jewellery are never appropriate for any new or unhealed piercing.
8. To be fully informed about proper aftercare, and to have continuing access to their piercer for consultation and assistance with all their piercing-related questions.

# Body piercing:

## Does it hurt?

Most people experience some level of discomfort or pain during the piercing procedure. The amount of discomfort or pain you feel is influenced not only by the location of the piercing but by your state of mind. When performed by an experienced piercer, most piercings take only a second and the pain is minimised.

Many people find breathing exercises help them to relax, concentrating on breathing slowly and deeply during the entire procedure, even while the piercer is preparing for the piercing. Many piercers will work with your breathing pattern, either by piercing on your exhale or on your signal. Holding your breath will cause you to tense.

## What to look for in a piercer

Consider first visiting the studio without intending to get pierced so that you are not under pressure or too nervous to be aware of the quality of the services. The best way to judge a piercer is to look at his/her work. If possible, talk to customers about their experiences. Ask to see a portfolio, specifically photographs of the piercing you are interested in and preferably photos of successfully healed piercings.

While attendance of a piercer training seminar or class should be considered an advantage, it does not guarantee a piercer's level of skill or experience. Ideally, a training seminar serves as a well-rounded introduction to safe and responsible piercing.

The facility should be clean, orderly, and well-lit. All instruments utilised during the procedure should be sterile. Disposable items such as gloves, needle, cork, towels, cotton swabs, and gauze pads should all be new and sterilized if possible.

The piercer should answer any questions before and after the piercing is performed. You should feel comfortable and at ease, not rushed. The piercer should review the piercing procedure and give both oral and written aftercare instructions. S/he should discuss the risks and possible complications associated with the piercing, which may include infection, migration or rejection, scarring, allergy or sensitivity to the jewellery, allergy or sensitivity to the aftercare products, and suggest a course of action in the event that a problem does occur.

## The Piercer

The piercer should wear new, disposable gloves throughout the procedure and should change gloves when appropriate to avoid cross contamination. Cross contamination occurs when a clean or sterile item comes into contact with a contaminated item. Cross contamination also occurs when a clean or sterile item is handled with contaminated gloves or gloves that have been worn to handle contaminated items. To prevent cross contamination of sterile instruments during the piercing procedure, the piercer should change gloves if s/he touches anything that is non-sterile or





unsuitably contaminated (ie. handled with bare hands or used instruments that have not been sterilised). After the piercer completes the piercing procedure, s/he should change gloves before handling items that will not be disposed of or autoclaved. Autoclave is a high pressure machine that uses steam to sterilise medical and other instruments, such as those used in body piercing.

Piercing needles are hollow, lancet-point needles, bevelled and sharpened similar to the hypodermic needles used by medical professionals. Most are about 2 inches in length. Piercing needles slice a crescent-shaped hole and do not remove tissue.

The needle should remain in its sterile autoclave package until the piercer is ready to proceed with the piercing. Needles should be used only once and placed in a medical sharps container which is disposed of through a medical waste disposal service. Aside from cleanliness concerns, needles are noticeably dulled from a single use.

Healing times vary considerably from weeks to months. You can safely judge a piercer by asking about their after care recommendations, or provision of follow up care.

## Material:

### Metals

The metals used for body jewellery are chosen for their bio-compatibility, or "body friendly" quality. Only solid gold of at least 14 karat (58.3% gold) is appropriate for body jewellery. Niobium is good though it should not be used for new piercings. This is the

best material for coloured jewellery. Only surgical quality stainless steel (316L and 316 LVM) is appropriate, and silver is inappropriate. The most suitable metal for body jewellery is titanium.

### Non-Metals

ACRYLICS: such as nylon or Teflon, are no good. Glow in the dark is not safe for the body, as phosphorescent material is carcinogenic, the alternative is black light or uv acrylic jewellery. Acrylic jewellery cannot be autoclaved, it must be cold sterilised. Also, plastics can develop a funky odour after being worn for a while.

WOOD: (for example hardwood) is a suitable material for wearing as body jewellery. Because hardwoods are porous and readily absorb and release moisture, oil, and bacteria, hardwood plugs are best worn in healed piercings and dry areas of the body. Because hardwood jewellery cannot be sterilised it should always be handled by clean hands and only worn by one person. Autoclaving hardwood jewellery may cause it to crack, split, and warp. Hardwood jewellery should be cleaned regularly with a non-chemical soap that is safe for the body. Watch out for allergies though.

### Aftercare

Do not allow your piercing to come in contact with another person's body fluids while the piercing is healing. This includes saliva as well as semen. It is critical that you keep the piercing clean, which means cleaning it in the shower at least twice a day, using an anti-bacterial wash recommended by your piercer. You should not touch the piercing while it is healing, especially during the first 3 weeks. The only time you need to touch it is when you are cleaning it, and you must ensure

that your hands are clean. This is the best way to avoid infection.

Finding a piercing-knowledgeable doctor is more difficult than finding a doctor that is piercing-friendly. While a doctor may have the best intentions, s/he may not be knowledgeable enough about piercings to identify problems caused by inappropriate jewellery, inappropriate placement, or a metal sensitivity. Doctors often assume that every problematic piercing is infected when the problem can be attributed to other factors.

Some people are hesitant to visit a doctor with a piercing problem because they think the doctor may disapprove. Your doctor should be professional and should not be morally judgmental or express personal disapproval about your piercings.

General wound healing process is comprised of three overlapping phases: inflammation, proliferation, and maturation. During the inflammatory phase, the area surrounding the piercing will be slightly red, swollen, and may feel warm to the touch. These symptoms should not worsen and should last no longer than a week.

Unlike a wound such as a scratch or cut, a piercing cannot heal across tissue layers. A piercing can be thought of as a tunnel whose entire inner surface must heal. If the body is unable reject a foreign object, in this case the jewellery, it begins the healing process in order to create a barrier against the foreign object.

Because the environment within the piercing is moist, the piercing cannot form a crust. The piercing will produce an discharge of lymph and dead cells. The discharge is white to off-white in color and dries to a yellow

crusty formation around the openings of the piercing and on the jewellery. This is completely normal. However if your piercing has a discharge of any other colour, it is a good idea to get in touch with your piercer.

As the epithelial layer forms, the piercing may constrict around the jewellery. The epithelial layer can easily be torn or dislodged; do not force the jewellery to rotate. The piercing may need to be soaked in warm water to allow the skin to expand so that the jewellery can be rotated.

Once the final layers of skin cells form within the piercing, they must toughen and strengthen. This process often requires 6 months to a year. As the piercing becomes more cohesive the entrances will round inwards, like a donut hole, and the piercing will become more flexible and relaxed around the jewellery. The tissue surrounding the piercing will soften.

If you plan to keep your piercing do not remove your jewellery for any length of time while it is healing. If changing the jewellery is necessary the change must be continuous to prevent the piercing from shrinking or closing. Ideally consult with a professional piercer before changing your jewellery.

Most body piercings require at least 6 months to a year before the jewellery can be removed for any length of time without the risk of the piercing growing closed. After the piercing has toughened it will not close but will often shrink, in which case the piercing must be stretched using an insertion taper to reinsert the jewellery.



# The 10 points of safety!!

Below is a list of ten absolutely basic standards that all responsible body artists MUST follow to practice safe body art and avoid disease transmission to themselves and their clientele.

1. Ear piercing guns are not adequately sterilisable. Because of this, and because they can cause serious, permanent damage to body parts other than earlobes, ear piercing guns should not be used in any piercing practice.
2. All tattooing and piercing needles should be pre-sterilised, used on one person, in one sitting, and immediately disposed of in a medical sharps container.
3. Clamps, tubes, forceps etc. should be pre-sterilised, stored in sterile bags, and used on one person, in one sitting. After one such use, they must be autoclaved or appropriately sterilised.
4. All reusable, nonsterilisable implements, such as tattoo guns and calipers, should be nonporous and disinfected after each use with bleach solution or a commercial hard-surface disinfectant liquid.
5. As many supplies as possible - including ink, inkpots, corks, rubber bands etc - should be either pre-sterilised in an autoclave; single use; or cleaned with disinfecting liquids. Then stored in a clean, closed container, and disposed of immediately after a single use.
6. A new pair of latex gloves (sterile or nonsterile) should be worn for every procedure, and gloves should be changed whenever the slightest chance of cross-contamination might occur.
7. The room used for tattooing and piercing, as well as the bathroom and other common areas, should be kept scrupulously clean and disinfected frequently. All surfaces should be nonporous, to allow them to be cleaned with bleach solution or other disinfecting liquids whenever cross-contamination might occur.
8. All jewellery not previously worn or contaminated should be disinfected with a non-hazardous hard-surface disinfectant. All jewellery previously worn by another person should be autoclaved.
9. Tattooists and piercers should provide detailed information about aftercare. This means discussing with clients the best way to look after new piercings and tattoos from the day of the procedure right through to long term care. All tattooists and piercers should make themselves freely available for further consultations regarding the healing process at no extra charge.
10. It is important for body artists to be open, available, and not under the influence of legal or illegal substances which would compromise their abilities. Body artists should meet or exceed all health, safety, and legal standards as required by state and local authorities.

