

PREVENTION WEDNESDAY

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City of Baltimore

Health Department

Tattoos: Health Risks and Precautions

Did You Know?

1. Tattoo establishments must be licensed and tattooists must be registered with the Health Department.

The Department inspects licensed establishments once a year to ensure that an establishment is sanitary and safe for both the tattooist and its clients. The City currently has 16 licensed establishments.

2. It is illegal to tattoo anyone under the age of 18.

3. There is an increase in popularity of private-citizen parties where tattooing by unlicensed individuals is provided.

By obtaining tattoos in an environment that is not properly sterilized and by an individual not properly licensed, the individuals expose themselves to health risks.

Prevention TIPS:

Tip 1 Make sure the establishment you choose is licensed and the tattooist registered.

Tip 2 Make sure the tattooist removes needles and tubes



from a sealed package before the procedure begins. Any pigments, trays and containers should be unused as well.

Tip 3 Make sure the tattooist washes his/her hands and puts on new gloves for each procedure.

Health Risks

- **Infection** – Dirty needles can pass infections, like hepatitis and HIV, from one person to another.
- **Allergies** – Allergies to various ink pigments in both permanent and temporary tattoos have been reported and can cause problems.
- **Skin disorders** – Your body may form bumps called granulomas around tattoo ink, especially if your tattoo includes red ink. Tattooing can also cause areas of raised, excessive scarring (keloids).
- **Skin infections** – Tattoos can lead to local bacterial infections. Typical signs and symptoms of an infection include redness, warmth, swelling and a pus-like drainage. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has linked clusters of potentially serious antibiotic-resistant skin infections to unlicensed tattoo artists who don't follow proper infection-control procedures. Some antibiotic-resistant skin infections can lead to pneumonia, blood infections and a painful, flesh-destroying condition called necrotizing fasciitis.
- **MRI complications** – People may have swelling or burning in the tattoo when they have magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). This happens rarely and does not last long.

Resources and References

- Food and Drug Administration: Tattoos and Permanent Makeup.
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/cos-204.html>
- The Mayo Clinic: Tattoos: Risks and precautions to know first.
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/tattoos-and-piercings/MC00020>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* Skin Infections Among Tattoo Recipients --- Ohio, Kentucky, and Vermont, 2004—2005.
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5524a3.htm>