

body-piercing & tattooing



protecting
your health





studs

sleepers

rings

loops

captive bead

rings

circular

barbells

tattoos

Thinking
of having
a **body
piercing?**
Maybe a
tattoo?

**It's your body. It's the
only one you get.**

It's your body, so it's your choice.
So make it an informed choice. Be
aware – **any** breaking of the skin's
surface means a risk of infection –
even invisible amounts of blood can
pass on infection.

**Some blood-borne infections you can get with
tattooing and body piercing:**

- hepatitis C – can cause long-term illness, liver damage and cancer of the liver – no immunisation available, you can be infected without knowing, easily passed from person to person by invisible amounts of blood
- hepatitis B – can result in long-term illness, liver damage and liver cancer – immunisation is available
- HIV – the virus that causes AIDS – no immunisation, no cure
- STIs – genital piercing may increase your risk of sexually transmitted infections
- common bacteria (like staphylococcus – 'staph') can also cause nasty skin infections that can damage the piercing or tattoo site.

**Tattooing and piercing may also result
in scars and disfigurement.**

OK, so you're letting someone pierce your skin. Ask to see the equipment.

How do they sterilise it? Is their whole place clean and well cared for?

Their service should ensure your safety as well as their own – ask if they follow the Ministry of Health *Guidelines for the Safe Piercing of Skin*.

Tattoo

Tattooing has been part of Māori and Pacific culture for hundreds of years. Bone was traditionally used for piercing the skin and sometimes still is. So are needles. Whatever is used, you're letting someone pierce your skin. Tattoo artists are everywhere now – and so are the risks. If you choose to have a tattoo, choose an experienced tattoo artist with a good, known, clean reputation.

Remember – tattoos are there for life. It would cost you a lot of money and need a specialist to try to remove them.

Consent

You might be asked to give your written consent to the procedure, and if you are under 16, you should take your parent or caregiver along.

Before you go for it

Check:

- area is clean and tidy
- new clean gloves are worn
- packages of sterile needles are opened just before use
- the operator wears sterile gloves to handle needles and place jewellery
- piercing gun is used only for **ear**-piercing, and is sterilised between uses
- an autoclave is used for sterilisation (stainless steel high-pressure steam cleaner)
- cleaning area is separate from studio
- used needles are placed in special container
- written full after-care instructions are provided.

Also check:

- your health status is asked about
- your consent is asked for
- secure client records are kept.

Do you feel comfortable there? Are you sure this is the place, or the action, for you? Is it **you** who wants to go ahead with it? Make sure what you have done is safe for **you**. Ask lots of questions.

Care of piercings and tattoos

The operator who does your piercing or tattoo should give you after-care advice – preferably written. Follow their instructions carefully. While the tattoo or piercing heals, you are still at risk of infection, scarring or disfigurement.

A piercing may take 6–8 weeks to heal – or even longer. You have to look after it while it's healing – and one piercing should heal before you have another one.

Sharing jewellery is a no-no! Infections can be passed on. All jewellery should be hypo-allergenic, high-quality metal.

Tattoo care includes keeping it out of water (apart from gentle washing!) and out of sunlight while it heals.

Looking after a piercing or a tattoo takes time and attention during the healing process.

Get advice from the operator, or from a doctor, if you have any problems.

It's your body – look after it!

New Zealand Government



This resource is available from
www.healthed.govt.nz or the
Authorised Provider at your local DHB.

