

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL
HEALTH PROTECTION AND SAFETY

Guidelines for Tattooing



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INTRODUCTION

Improperly used tattooing equipment carries a risk of infection from serious communicable diseases (such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV) and of injury. Clients undergoing this procedure should be advised to discuss these risks with their family physician. Individuals with heart disease, seizures, diabetes, skin disorders, infections or bleeding disorders should not be tattooed.

When a person chooses to acquire a tattoo, it is important for that person to be aware of the health risks involved, so they can make an informed decision about getting a tattoo. This booklet is designed to provide owners and staff of tattoo studios with a set of guidelines that will help them prevent health risks both to their clients and themselves, particularly the spread of infectious or communicable diseases. It also addresses the issue of informed consent.

Public Health Officials may refer to this document and to the British Columbia Ministry of Health's *Guidelines for Personal Services Establishments (PSEs*)* when assessing whether a tattoo studio is being operated in accordance with the Personal Services Establishment Regulation. However, following the guidelines listed in this document does not relieve the owner and/or operator from the obligation to take any additional measures necessary to prevent health hazards from occurring in the establishment. Operators are also responsible for ensuring that they are carrying on business in compliance with municipal and other regulatory requirements, and for obtaining business licences and/or operating permits from the appropriate licensing authorities.

INFORMED CONSENT

Operators must consider the issue of informed consent by their customers in addition to taking measures to prevent disease transmission and injury. A large percentage of complaints regarding the tattoo industry arise from the tattooing of minors. It is recommended that operators seek legal advice on the use and form of a declaration of health risks and a consent to being tattooed. In general terms, operators should satisfy themselves that customers are undertaking the procedure of their own free will and not as the result of a bet or dare, that they are not under the influence of alcohol or other judgement-altering drugs, and that they are aware that tattooing is permanent and carries health risks, although these risks are reduced if these guidelines are followed. In order to give their informed consent minors must have the maturity to and must understand all the implications of being tattooed. It is recommended that operators require minors to obtain parental consent.

* This booklet may be viewed on Ministry of Health's Internet site, at <http://www.hlth.gov.bc.ca/protect/persserv.html>

1. PREMISES AND GENERAL OPERATION

- Refer to *Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs)* – Sec. 2.
- Smoking should not be permitted in the tattooing area.
- Lighting in tattoo work areas should be capable of 100 foot candles illumination.
- The area where tattooing takes place should be separated from the rest of the studio by a wall or partition to provide privacy as needed.
- An ultrasonic cleaning device should be used, and the solution discarded after each client.
- A proper autoclave sterilizer should be provided and should be in proper working order. Time temperature test strips should be provided to monitor the sterilizer's effectiveness.

2. PREPARATION AND HANDLING OF INSTRUMENTS AND EQUIPMENT

- Refer to *Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs)* – Sec. 3.
- Only professional tattooing machines with removable tubes should be used.
- The tattooing machine should be assembled in a manner which prevents contamination of the sterilized needle sets.
- All clip cords and spray bottles should have triggers and grasped areas protected by plastic bag or wrap which is disposed of after each client.
- Stainless steel needles are recommended. They should be soldered onto the needle bars with lead-free solder. Residue build-up from the soldering process should be removed using an ultrasonic cleaning device.
- Work surfaces should be damp-wiped with disinfectant (e.g. 10% household bleach solution or 70% isopropyl alcohol) after each client. (See also *Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs)*, Appendix A – Methods of sterilization and disinfection).
- Equipment and supplies should be stored in clean, designated storage cabinets.

3. PIGMENTS (DYES OR INKS)

- All pigments used should be chemically pure, non-toxic and non-sensitizing. Dry powder pigments should be prepared as per the manufacturer's specifications and in a hygienic manner. Dyes and pigments containing mercury (e.g. cinnabar/vermillion/red mercuric oxide) are not permitted to be used in Canada.
- Pigments needed for each client should be dispensed into small, sterile, single use capsules in a manner that prevents contamination of the pigments (e.g. using plastic squeeze bottles) and discarded after use with each client. Pigments should be stored and handled in a sanitary manner to avoid contamination (see Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs), section 5a).
- *Caution:* Some individuals may have an allergic reaction to even the most pure and non-toxic pigments. If the client shows any type of allergic reaction during the tattooing process (e.g. paleness, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, undue swelling, puffiness around the eyes) the tattooing process should be stopped and immediate emergency medical attention should be obtained.

4. INFECTION CONTROL

General

- A new sterilized needle set should be used for each client.
- All needles should be discarded after each use with each client. A needle set should not be stored for future use with the same client
- After tattooing, the remaining unused pigment(s) should be discarded.
- The needle(s) should not be tested on the tattoo artist's skin before or during use.
- The tattoo needle(s) and tube tip should be maintained in a sterile condition prior to being used and should not come into contact with any contaminated surface during use.
- If tube and needle sets are rinsed between colours, this should be done using an ultrasonic cleaning device, and the solution discarded after each client.
- Excess pigment should be removed from the skin with a clean, absorbent and disposable material (e.g. paper towel or facial tissue) in conjunction with an antiseptic solution such as "tincture of green soap".

Skin Preparation

- The skin area to be tattooed should be examined for signs of open lesions, rashes or other irregularities and if found the tattoo should be postponed.
- Disposable razors should be used, one for each client. Alternately, metal safety razors with disposable blades may be used but the blade should be discarded after use on one client and the razor sterilized prior to re-use.
- The skin should be washed well with soap and then swabbed with a disinfectant (eg. Germiphene, 70% alcohol, Hibitane 2% solution, or providone iodine 10% solution) before tattooing.
- Any adhesive used to apply a stencil to the skin (e.g. deodorant stick) should be applied with a single use, disposable item (such as a paper towel, tongue depressor, plastic wrap, etc) to prevent contamination of the adhesive source. Sprayed-on adhesives (e.g. Green Soap Tincture in a spray bottle) are acceptable.
- If lubricating gel such as petroleum jelly is used, individual portions should be dispensed without contaminating the bulk supply (e.g. by using disposable tongue depressor, not fingers). Refer to the *Personal Service Establishment Guidelines (PSEs)*, Section 5A. Any unused portion should be discarded.

Cleaning

- At the end of the session, disposable needles should be melted off the needle bar and discarded into a puncture resistant (i.e. “sharps”) container.
- Gloves should be worn when removing the needles from bars. Procedures should be followed which minimize the handling of needles.
- Used bars and tubes should be stored in a suitable container prior to cleaning. All containers used to hold contaminated instruments should be cleaned and disinfected daily.
- Prior to sterilization, used needle bars and tubes (including the inside of the tube) should be scrubbed to remove any adherent matter and then cleaned in an ultrasonic cleaning device. Ultrasonic cleaning detergents should be discarded after use with each client.

Disinfection

- Plastic stencils should be washed in soap and warm water and disinfected with a solution of 70% alcohol before use and after use. Paper stencils should be discarded after one application.
- All work surfaces and equipment which cannot be autoclaved (e.g. tattoo machines) should be damp-wiped with a disinfectant such as 10 per cent household bleach solution, 70% isopropyl alcohol or equivalent after each client. (See also *Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs)*, Appendix A).

Sterilization

- All needles, tubes and bars should be sterilized before use by autoclaving 30 minutes at 121 degrees Celsius at 103 kps (15 psi) in autoclave bags or steriseal-type pouches with indicators or indicator tape. See also *Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs)* – Section 4 and appendix A.
- Sterile packages should be removed from the sterilizer without contamination (ie with forceps) and stored in clean, designated storage cabinets. Instruments should remain in their sterile packages until used.
- Plastic peel packs are considered to keep the wrapped instrument sterile for 6 to 12 months. Check the manufacturers specifications for storage times.

5. WASTE DISPOSAL

- Disposable materials (eg. cotton, gauze, paper towelling etc.) should be discarded after each use on a client.
- Refer to *Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs)* – Sec. 4G regarding disposal of sharps and other potentially contaminated items.

6. PERSONAL SERVICE WORKERS

- Refer to *Guidelines for Personal Service Establishments (PSEs)* – Sec. 6.
- The tattooist should follow Universal Precaution guidelines (see Health File #29 at the Ministry of Health's website:
<http://www.hlth.gov.bc.ca/hlthfile/index.html>
- The tattooist should wash his/her hands before and after tattooing. See *Guidelines for Personal Services Establishments (PSEs)* – Sec. 4 Infection Control (Wash your hands!).
- Each tattooist should wear a clean outer garment.

- It is recommended that single-use latex or vinyl gloves be used during the tattooing process. Gloves should be changed between clients and should not be re-used. The regular changing of gloves is not a substitute for hand washing between clients.
- Information on latex sensitivity to gloves can be obtained from local Health Departments.
- It is recommended that all tattooists be immunized against Hepatitis B and tetanus (lockjaw).
- The tattooist should consult a physician immediately if there is an accidental exposure to blood or other body fluids. Time is of the essence in reducing the risk of infection from an exposure.

7. POST-TATTOOING SKIN CARE

- The tattooed area should be wiped clean with an alcohol swab, Hibitane 2% solution, or povidone iodine 10% solution and covered with a sterile non-stick dressing which should be taped to the skin and left in place for 24 hours.
- Ointments should be applied in a manner which will prevent the contamination of bulk supplies (i.e. use disposable tongue depressor, not fingers).
- The tattooist should provide the client with verbal and written skin care instructions after tattooing and should instruct the client to consult a physician at the first sign of infection in the area of the tattoo.
- Open air exposure during the healing phase is the norm, but the tattoo should be covered if it is going to be excessively exposed to dirty environments.
- Constricting or abrasive clothing should not be worn directly on a tattooed surface for a few days in order to prevent irritation.
- Clients requesting tattoo removal should be referred to a physician, preferably one experienced in laser tattoo removal.
- The client should be advised not to swim in chlorinated or salt water, as either may leach out the pigment through the incompletely healed punctures. Intense sunlight exposure should be avoided until the tattoo is fully healed.

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<http://www.hlth.gov.bc.ca/protect/persserv.html>