

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN  
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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## Body Art Safety

### What Is Body Art?

Body Art is the practice of physically enhancing appearance through tattooing and body piercing.

Tattooing is any method of placing ink or other pigment into or under the skin's surface using needles or other instruments that puncture the skin, resulting in permanent coloration of the skin.

Body piercing is any method of piercing the skin, except the outer lobe of the ear, in order to place an object including rings, studs, bars, or other forms of jewelry or ornamentation through the skin.

### Are there laws governing Body Art?

Body Art establishments are regulated and monitored under Article VII of the Oakland County Sanitary Code. Oakland County Health Division's, Environmental Health Services Unit must license and inspect all body art establishments. This license must be clearly displayed in the reception area of the facility. Individuals under the age of 18 must have written consent from a parent or legal guardian to receive any type of body art procedure. Practitioners may require proof of age, such as a driver's license, for clients who appear too young. Establishments must maintain a record of all clients who have had body art services. These records must be retained for a minimum of 5 years.

### What kinds of health problems can be caused by tattooing or body piercing?

It is possible to get diseases from exposure to blood, however the risk is small when the body artist is following established guidelines. Although there have not been any cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) from getting a tattoo or piercing, there still is a risk. There is also a risk of getting Hepatitis B and C when unsterile equipment and techniques are used. Other possible infections include blood poisons, Staphylococcal infections (including MRSA), and other skin diseases.

### What are some signs of infection?

Although some swelling is normal, you should talk to your health care provider if you have any of the following symptoms after getting a tattoo or piercing:

- Thick yellow or green discharge coming from the area
- Continued oozing or bleeding from the site
- Red streaks or hot sensation moving away from the area
- Pain that continues to get worse
- Any unusual pain or swelling
- Fever

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## What precautions can I take?

When going to a body art establishment make sure of the following:

- The facility is licensed and each practitioner has a permit (the license and permits will be displayed in the reception area).
- Client's rights are displayed.
- Gloves are worn by the artist.
- All needles and tubes are sterile, disposable, unwrapped in front of you, and disposed of in a properly labeled red sharps container.
- A new container of ink is being used for tattooing.
- Hand-washing facilities with running water are available for the artist to use.
- Work areas and equipment are cleaned after each person with an approved cleaner.
- Practitioner uses jewelry and metals designed for piercing.
- Practitioner does not reuse or resell jewelry for piercing.
- Practitioner knows enough about anatomy of the body to safely pierce more vulnerable parts.
- Practitioner has been informed of any allergies or medical conditions.
- No animals, except dogs for the blind and patrol dogs are allowed in the area.
- No eating, drinking or smoking is being done in the procedure area.
- The person giving the tattoo or piercing is not ill, i.e. diarrhea, vomiting, fever over 100°F, rash, coughing, jaundice, or drainage from an open wound.

## Are there other health issues to be aware of with body art?

- You should never cover a mole with a tattoo; it may become cancerous.
- If you tend to form large, bumpy scars it may occur on the tattoo.
- If you are pregnant or have certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, talk to your health care provider before getting a tattoo or piercing.
- Inform your health care provider of any tattoo or piercing you have so you can be assessed for any reactions.
- If you have been drinking or using drugs, you should not get a tattoo or piercing. Alcohol and/or certain drugs can cause more bleeding than normal.
- Alcohol and/or certain drugs may cause a person to have poor judgement. Consider waiting until you are no longer under the influence of alcohol or drugs to get your tattoo or piercing.

**For more information on Body Art Safety, call (248) 926-3305**

For additional copies, visit our website at [www.oakgov.com/health](http://www.oakgov.com/health).

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