

Think Before You Ink

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A Changing Perspective: Tattoos Aren't Just For the Rebellious Anymore

Tattoos are nothing new. The art of tattooing has been around since 3370 to 3100 BC. Tattooing has been used as cultural symbols among tribal populations, to show a person's status in society, for healing, as a form of punishment, and for spiritual and decorative purposes. Now it has become an increasingly common way for people to express themselves through body art. Tattoos have become a norm in U.S. society, where you can find anyone from a six-figure executive to a high school freshman with at least one tattoo. In 2008, a research study found that 36% of people age 18-25 and 40% of people age 26-40 had at least one tattoo (1). But with this increase in popularity comes risk as tattoos are expensive, some tattoo artists try to cut equipment costs by using bad ink or reusing equipment, and minors in most States must seek adult consent making tattoo parties and other unlicensed tattoo venues popular.

Getting Tatted While Incarcerated

Tattooing is a common part of prison culture, but is also extremely risky. Equipment used for tattooing is often used from found objects like ink from an ink pen, motors made from fans or dryers, or tattoo needles made from sewing needles and staples. In addition to this the materials used are often limited so the chances of being tattooed with the same needle as another person is quite high. Roughly 2.2 million people are incarcerated in U.S State and Federal prisons (2). It is estimated that 1.5% (21,987) of the prison population is HIV positive and 33% (733,333) are infected with Hepatitis C (2)(3). Tattooing multiple people with the same needle or using the same instruments to wipe away blood can transfer blood-borne viruses like HIV and Hepatitis C from one person to another.

Tattoo Parties

Know the law: Tattoo parties in Baltimore City are against the law. Tattoo parties are popular among youth usually looking to get an inexpensive tattoo. These parties often happen in someone's house by an unlicensed artist who has purchased their own tattoo kit. The environment where these parties happen puts young people at risk for transmission or HIV and blood-borne diseases, skin infections, keloids (abnormal growth of scar tissue), and possibly just a bad tattoo.



Citations:

1. Pew Research Center (2008). Tattooed Gen Nexters. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2008/12/09/tattooed-gen-nexters/>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013). Hepatitis C & Incarceration. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/pdfs/hepcinccarcerationfactsheet.pdf>
3. Maruschak, L M., Beavers, R. (2010). HIV in Prisons, 2007-08, U.S Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. Retrieved from: [http://www.gmhc.org/files/editor/file/a_pa_prison_report0511\(1\).pdf](http://www.gmhc.org/files/editor/file/a_pa_prison_report0511(1).pdf)

Safety Check: What to look for when getting your tattoo done

- The tattoo artist had you fill out a written consent form
- The tattoo artist should wash his/ her hands before putting on gloves
- The tattoo artist should clean your skin with alcohol at the site where the tattoo will be, to remove dirt and bacteria
- Make sure the instruments, bandages, and equipment are sterile. Most tattoo artists will open a single use needle package in front of you. If this does not happen ask them if they can get a new needle package and open it in front of you
- Make sure the ink being used on you is not expired, expired ink can cause severe problems when it comes in contact with your skin
- The tattoo artist should make sure to prevent infection during the procedure by maintaining a clean work surface, cleaning up an blood as a result of the tattoo, pouring ink into a single use container and then discarding after use,
- The tattoo artist after the procedure should provide you with written instructions about what to expect during the healing process and how to care for the tattoo once it starts to heal.

What can you do to protect yourself?

- If you had a tattoo done at a unlicensed venue consider getting tested for HIV and other STDs at your next doctors appointment
- If you have a young person in your life talk with them about safe tattooing
- See something say something: If you are in a situation where the tattoo artist is not using safe methods, do not continue with the tattoo

Looking for a tattoo artist who is licensed by the Baltimore City Health Department?

<https://health.baltimorecity.gov/environmental-health/tattoo-facilities>

