## Understand the Risks and Precautions of Body Art

The popularity of tattoos and other body art is at an all-time high, and so too is the ease and convenience of getting a tattoo. But before people visit a local tattoo artist, they should have a basic understanding of the risks and safety precautions associated with tattooing.

The following information comes from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Mayo Clinic, and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

A tattoo is a permanent mark or design made on your skin with pigments inserted through pricks into the skin's top layer. Typically, the tattoo artist uses a hand-held machine that acts much like a sewing machine, with one or more needles piercing the skin repeatedly. With every puncture, the needles insert tiny ink droplets. The process — which is done without anesthetics and may last up to several hours for a large tattoo — causes a small amount of bleeding and slight to potentially significant pain.

Tattoos breach the skin, which means that skin infections and other complications are possible. Specific risks include:

Allergic reactions. Tattoo dyes — especially red dye — can cause allergic skin reactions, resulting in an itchy rash at the tattoo site. This may occur even years after you get the tattoo.

**Skin infections.** Tattoos can lead to local bacterial infections, characterized by redness, swelling, pain and a pus-like drainage.

Other skin problems. Sometimes bumps called granulomas form around tattoo ink — especially red ink. Tattooing can also lead to raised areas caused by an overgrowth of scar tissue (keloids).

**Bloodborne diseases.** If the equipment used to create your tattoo is contaminated with infected blood, you can contract various bloodborne diseases, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, tetanus and HIV — the virus that causes AIDS.

**MRI complications.** Rarely, tattoos or permanent makeup may cause swelling or burning in the affected areas during magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exams. In some cases — such as when a person with permanent eyeliner has an MRI of the eye — tattoo pigments may interfere with the quality of the image.

Medication or other treatment may be needed if you develop an allergic reaction, infection or other skin problem. In some cases, the tattoo may need to be removed. Keep in mind that tattoo inks are classified as cosmetics, so they aren't regulated or approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

To make sure your tattoo will be applied safely, answer these questions:

Who does the tattooing? Go to a licensed, reputable tattooing studio that employs only properly trained employees. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services has adopted new administrative rules (ARM Title 37, Chapter 112, subchapter 1) requiring licensing of tattooing, permanent make-up, body piercing and ear lobe piercing establishments.

**Does the tattoo artist wear gloves?** Make sure the tattoo artist washes his or her hands and wears a fresh pair of protective gloves for each procedure.

**Does the tattoo artist use proper equipment?** Make sure the tattoo artist removes a needle and tubes from sealed packages before your procedure begins. Any pigments, trays and containers should be unused as well.

**Does the tattoo artist sterilize nondisposable equipment?** Make sure the tattoo artist uses a heat sterilization machine (autoclave) to sterilize all nondisposable equipment after each customer. Instruments and supplies that can't be sterilized with an autoclave — including drawer handles, tables and sinks — should be disinfected with a commercial disinfectant or bleach solution after each use.

Also ask yourself whether you truly want to invest in permanent body art. Choose the location of the tattoo carefully. Don't get a tattoo if you're under the influence of alcohol or drugs or worry that you might regret the tattoo later.

Montana's Food and Consumer Safety Section has provided information about its Body Art Program on its Web-site <a href="www.fcss.mt.gov">www.fcss.mt.gov</a>. The following is a list of frequently asked questions and answers regarding tattooing, cosmetic tattooing, body piercing and ear piercing.

- Q. Is a license required for a tattooing, cosmetic tattooing, body piercing, or ear piercing in Montana?
- A. Yes, the Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services adopted administrative rules (ARM Title 37, Chapter 112, subchapter 1) requiring licensing of tattooing, permanent make-up, body piercing and ear lobe piercing establishments, effective March 23, 2007.
- Q. If I tattoo or pierce only friends for no charge, do I still need a license?
- A. Yes. Offering the services of tattooing, cosmetic tattooing, body piercing or ear piercing requires a license in Montana.
- Q. Can a person under the age of 18 get a tattoo or piercing without consent of the parents?
- A. No. Tattooing or piercing, including ear piercing, can only be done legally on someone who is at least 18 years of age, or who has the explicit in-person consent of a parent or guardian. The parent or legal guardian must be with the minor at all times during the tattooing or piercing.
- Q. How do I know the ink for my tattoo is safe?
- A. Although a number of color additives are approved for use in cosmetics by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA), none is approved for injection into the skin. The FDA does not regulate tattoo ink or the pigments in them. Many pigments used in tattoo inks are not approved for skin contact at all. Some are industrial grade colors that are originally produced for printer's ink or automobile paint. The current rules in Montana require that pigments or dyes disapproved or under recall by FDA or under the Montana Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act may not be used.

- Q. If I have a tattooing license, can I do tattoo removal?
- A. No. The Montana Board of Medical Examiners has determined tattoo removal is the practice of medicine. A tattooing license does not endorse any activities beyond the scope of the rules pertaining to tattooing, such as medical procedures or medical practice.
- Q. Once I have my license for tattooing or piercing, can I tattoo or pierce at a client's home, another business, or an event?
- A. No. A license is valid for one location only. Tattooing and piercing are not allowed in a client's home, where conditions of sanitation can vary greatly. If you are visiting another licensed body art establishment, you may join them as a guest artist for less than 60 days. In this case, the licensee has the responsibility of ensuring compliance with the administrative rules. A separate license is required when tattooing or piercing at a temporary event such as a concert or rally,
- Q. If my mobile unit is licensed, can I do tattooing or piercing anywhere in Montana?
- A. Yes, a licensed mobile unit may used as an establishment in any county in Montana. If the mobile unit is not used, then an additional temporary event license is required.
- Q. What are the Montana requirements for sterilization?
- A. Tattooing and piercing establishments are required to use autoclave sterilization for all items that come into contact with the customer, or use sterile prepackaged disposable items. Regardless of the sterilization method, Montana rule requires that the package be opened in view of the client.
- Q. Are there any types of body art that is not allowed?
- A. Yes. Body art is a rapidly changing industry. Because some new techniques of body art may cause a higher chance of disease or injury, they may be restricted practices in a licensed business. One example is implants, also know as surface anchors or microdermals. There are other practices that are also not allowed. For more information, refer to the Administrative Rules of Montana, Title 37, Chapter 112, subchapter 165, available at <a href="https://www.fcss.mt.gov">www.fcss.mt.gov</a>.

In order to help citizens understand more clearly many of the environmental health issues in Ravalli County and the role of the Environmental Health Department in addressing these issues, our department runs a series newspaper articles titled "Environmental Health Talk."

In this ongoing series we hope to help raise the community's awareness of issues such as air and water quality and give readers useful tips on topics like recycling, collecting and disposing of hazardous materials and maintaining septic systems, just to name a few. To this end, we welcome pubic comment. If there's an environmental health issue you'd like us to address, write call or email the department: RCEH, c/o "EnviroHealth Talk," 215 South 4<sup>th</sup> St, Suite D, Hamilton MT 59840. Phone: 375-6571. Email: rdaniel@ravallicounty.mt.gov