

TATTOOING

A tattoo is a form of body modification that involves the insertion of dyes or inks into the skin using a needle to create a permanent image or design. A tattoo can be placed on almost every part of the skin, although eyeball (scleral) tattoos are prohibited.

INFECTION RISKS

Microorganisms can enter the tissue under the skin or mucous membrane at the tattoo site and cause an infection. Equipment can become contaminated with bacteria, fungi and viral blood borne pathogens such as hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Infections can spread from:

- Contaminated and/or improperly reprocessed equipment or ink
- Tap water used to dilute the ink
- Client's own bacteria on the skin
- Unclean hands touching the treated area

The result may be localized skin infections caused by bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus* or *Mycobacterium spp.* or *Streptococcus spp.* Contaminated tattoo inks have been related to outbreaks of bacterial infection.

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL REQUIREMENTS

Equipment:

- Single-use, disposable sterile needles or needle cartridges must be kept sterile until point of use and discarded in an appropriate sharps container immediately after use. Needles are not to be used beyond the date of expiry indicated by the manufacturer. Do not use needles if there are no expiry dates and lot numbers
- Needles are not to be saved for reuse on the same client
- Sharps container must be stored at point of use
- All reusable equipment/instruments/items are to be reprocessed after each use
- Items that cannot be reprocessed are to be discarded after use (e.g., plastic ink caps)
- Single-use ink caps provided in bulk are to be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected before use. Use an [intermediate level disinfectant](#) such as 70% isopropyl alcohol (which has a natural product number)
- All supplies required for the tattoo procedure are to be assembled and set-up immediately before the procedure
- All reusable uncovered equipment and instruments such as clip cords, contact screws, service trays, squeeze bottles, electric devices, machines and controls must be cleaned and disinfected with an intermediate-level solution between clients. If covered by a single-use wrap, they may be cleaned and disinfected with a low-level disinfectant
- Materials used for dressings are to be kept in a cleanable rigid container with a tight-fitting lid to protect them from contamination

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- Needle cartridges for tattoo machine pens must be equipped with a form of backflow prevention
- Leftover inks, petroleum jelly and other items dispensed during the tattoo procedure are to be discarded and are not to be reused

Operational Requirements:

- Tattooing should not be performed on a client if nearby skin (within 15 cm/6 inches) has a rash or is inflamed or infected. If this is not possible, service must be delayed until the area has healed
- Skin that is visibly soiled must be cleaned with soap and water before starting the procedure
- Operators are to apply skin antiseptic to the area of the client’s skin that is being treated
- Only topical local anesthetic approved for use by Health Canada is permitted. The site is to be cleaned with a suitable skin antiseptic before applying the anesthetic. Note: Injectable anesthetic is prohibited
- Skin antiseptics are to be stored and dispensed carefully in a way that prevents contamination
- If hair removal is required, a single-use razor is to be used and discarded in an approved sharps container after use
- If a stencil transfer is required, skin is to be cleaned and an appropriate stencil transfer solution used (e.g., deodorant sticks are not to be used)
- Antiseptics are not needed for piercings inside the mouth; ensure the client’s mouth, including tongue, teeth and gums, is clean (e.g., clean with a single-use toothbrush)
- Before performing genital piercings, operators are to clean the procedure site with warm water and a liquid soap
- If inks are diluted, sterile water is to be used. Tap water is not to be used
- Following completion of the procedure, operators are to cover the tattooed area (if applicable)
- Dressings must be single-use to cover the tattooed area (e.g., sterile gauze secured with hypoallergenic tape, or a clean dressing provided in a roll or individual package) and intended for tattoo aftercare
- Clients are provided with verbal and written aftercare information following the procedure, including a recommendation to see a doctor within 24 hours if any signs of infection develop

Reprocessing Classification

Sterilization	Low-Level Disinfection	Single-Use, Disposable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable grips and tips • Reusable ink caps (metal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tattoo device that is wrapped with single-use wrap • Tables, chairs, beds • Rigid containers used to hold dirty equipment until reprocessing (at end of day) • Service trays • Squeeze bottles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bandages to cover tattoos • Elastic bands • Lubricant applicators • Tattoo needles • Needle cartridges • Plastic covers • Razors • Single-use ink caps** • Stencils • Single-use rinse cups • Ointment applicators • Single-use personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, gowns, eye protection) • Wipes, tissues, and dental bibs

*These items are to be sterile before use

** These items are to be intermediate level disinfected before use

SOURCES

1. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Guide to infection prevention and control in personal service settings. 3rd ed. Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario; 2019

This fact sheet was adapted with permission from CIPHI Ontario and is based on PSS best practices recommendations, current reprocessing standards and legislation. It is not an inclusive list of all requirements. Operators are responsible to ensure that all services are offered according to local requirements, best practices and legislation.