

Tattoos and Body Piercing

(McKenzie Pediatrics 2010)

Tattoos and body piercing are becoming popular among teenagers and preteenagers. Here is what you need to know before considering this type of "body art".

How is tattooing done?

First, the skin is cleaned with an antiseptic solution and covered with a layer of petroleum jelly. Then the tattooist outlines the design with a bar that contains 3 to 5 needles and then colors in with a "shader" which has 5 to 13 flat needles. This process can take anywhere from 15 minutes to several sessions.

Is it permanent?

Removing a tattoo, even a small one, is very expensive and usually leaves a scar so it should be considered permanent. Many teenagers (1 in 4 to 1 in 2) eventually regret getting a tattoo.

What are the risks of getting a tattoo?

- Infection: Many bacterial and viral infections can be spread during the process of getting body art. Do not have your friend do tattooing and do not do it yourself.
A proper tattoo shop should have: a machine called autoclave to sterilize equipment, a very clean work area, artists who wash their hands before the procedure and wear gloves, individual ink/pigment containers that are thrown away after each customer, sterile and disposable needles, and a written information about how to take care of your tattoo.
But infection is always possible when the skin is punctured. If the skin that has been tattooed becomes red, swollen or painful, let your parents or doctor know.
- Allergic reaction: Some people are allergic to the pigments or carriers used in tattoos. The pigments used for tattooing is neither inspected nor regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.
- Pain: Do not drink alcohol or take drugs before the procedure to lessen the pain. They can cause you to bleed more.

Is it illegal for kids to get a tattoo?

Some states and cities have laws that forbid tattooing of kids under 18 years of age. In Oregon, tattooing anyone under 18 year of age is prohibited even with parental consent.

How is body piercing done?

The skin is sterilized with an antiseptic solution. Ice may be used to numb the area. Spring-loaded guns with piercing studs or sterilized needles are used to puncture the skin.

What are the risks of body piercing?

Like tattooing, infection can occur. Some people have allergic reaction to the metals in jewelry. Avoid jewelry that contain nickel and choose jewelry made of stainless steel, titanium, or 14K gold. In infants, tearing of the ear lobe can occur if the baby rips the earring out as well as choking if the infant is able to remove an earring and put it in the mouth. Sometimes, the backing of the earring may become embedded in the earlobe due to pressure on the earring.

Is it illegal for kids to get a body pierce?

In Oregon, piercing on a person under 18 years of age is prohibited unless written parental consent is submitted in person to the facility. Genital or nipple piercing is prohibited for kids under 18 years of age regardless of parental consent.