

# Tattooing – Know the Risks

## Part 4 Summary Offences Act 1953

### South Australian Law

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- You must be 18 before you get a tattoo
- Parents *cannot* give consent to a minor being tattooed
- You must take valid photo identification with you (which the studio may ask to photocopy for its records), provide your name and address and sign a written agreement with the studio
- A tattoo artist has the right to refuse to tattoo you if they are concerned that you may be under 18

### Risks involved

Contaminated equipment, unclean premises, unsafe procedures and a lack of infection control knowledge may potentially contribute to the spread of various infections. Infections cannot only occur during the procedure, but can also occur if the tattoo isn't cared for properly afterwards.

Specific risks include:

- Blood borne viruses such as hepatitis B, C or HIV
- Skin infections such as *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph)
- Allergic reactions to tattoo ink
- Granulomas – nodules around the tattoo
- Keloid formation – abnormal scar tissue
- Aggravation or flare up of existing skin conditions e.g. dermatitis, eczema

### DO NOT tattoo yourself or get a 'home job' done – amateur tattoos are risky.

Go to a professional tattoo artist working in an established studio. This will reduce your risk of getting an infection. You can also ask the tattooist or ring the local council to ask if the studio has been inspected by Environmental Health Officers for compliance with SA Health Guidelines on health and safety.

### A responsible tattoo artist should:

- Freely answer questions about their experience, infection control techniques and tattooing procedures in their studio
- Know the SA Health *Guidelines on the Safe and Hygienic Practice of Skin Penetration* and can talk about it with you
- Ask you about any personal health matters which could indicate that you should not be tattooed
- Outline potential risks, complications and healing times
- Operate from a clean and tidy, well lit professional studio. The tattoo artists should be clean and tidy too
- Use new disposable equipment or sterilise reusable equipment using a functioning bench top steam steriliser (autoclave)
- Open sterilised, packaged needles and tubes in front of you. The packaging keeps the item sterile until used
- Put inks into clean containers and discard them following the procedure
- Clean and disinfect the area of skin thoroughly before tattooing you



- Wash their hands at the beginning and end of the procedure
- Put on new disposable gloves before starting the procedure and only touch your skin, the needle or tattoo machine. A good tattoo artist will change gloves many times during your procedure
- Discuss the aftercare of your tattoo and give you written aftercare instructions
- Encourage you to return so the healing process can be checked

### Think before you ink!

A tattoo is permanent so choose carefully and think long-term. Removing a tattoo is a painstaking process, usually involving several laser treatments and considerable expense. Complete removal without scarring may be impossible.

### Take good care of your tattoo

It is important to ensure that your tattoo heals well without infection. Your personal hygiene, employment and hobbies may affect how well your tattoo heals. Your tattoo artist will advise you on the best aftercare to suit your tattoo. Allow up to two weeks for healing.

When finished, your tattoo artist will clean the tattooed area and may cover it with a bandage. If the bandage is especially made to apply after a tattooing procedure then your tattoo artist will tell you when to remove it. Plastic wrap is a 'get home' cover only and should be removed as soon as possible. Plastic wrap does not breathe and so retards the healing process by creating a warm, moist, airless environment that encourages bacterial growth. After the bandage is removed wash your tattoo.

### General aftercare advice:

- **DO** wash hands thoroughly before cleaning or touching the tattooed area
- **DO** keep area clean and dry
- **DO** wash the tattoo with clean running water and a mild liquid soap. Rinse and pat dry preferably with paper towel

- **DO** use a cream recommended by your tattoo artist and apply it when the skin feels as if it is drying out
- **DO** get enough sleep and eat a nutritious diet. A healthy lifestyle will help your tattoo to heal
- **DO NOT** rub, pick or scratch your new tattoo as this can lead to infection and delay healing
- **DO NOT** soak your tattoo or swim until after the tattoo has healed
- **DO NOT** expose your healing tattoo to direct sunlight. After your tattoo has healed, apply sunscreen (SPF 15-30+) to prevent fading of the tattoo
- **DO NOT** wear tight or dirty clothing

After a few days you will notice some peeling and possibly a little scabbing, this is normal and there is no need to panic.

You should notify your tattoo artist and seek medical advice if you notice any signs of infection, if the tattooed area is very wet or weeping, if there is heavy scabbing, lots of redness, inflammation, a rash or if you have any concerns associated with how your tattoo is healing.

Don't get a tattoo if you are sick. Being unwell will slow the healing process and increase the risk of local infection.

If you are taking any medication or have any medical problems such as allergies, skin disorders, a condition that affects your immune system, or if you are pregnant – ask your doctor if it is ok to get tattooed or if there are special precautions that you need to take and let the tattoo artist know.

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