

Infection Prevention during Ear/Body Piercing

1. The Ear Piercing Gun

If an ear piercing gun is to be used, one with a disposable sterile cartridge that holds the studs is highly recommended. The disposable cartridge is removed after the piercing of ears, and the remainder of the gun must be wiped with 70% alcohol between clients. Wiping the gun reduces the likelihood that the practitioner will contaminate the new sterile cartridge. Use of the new sterile cartridge greatly reduces the chances of infecting the next client.

Many shops use ear piercing guns with a solid head (no disposable sterile cartridge) creating cleaning and disinfection difficulties that increase the risk of transmitting infection. The solid head has crevices that are difficult to clean, and disinfection involves immersing the entire gun in a high level disinfectant, e.g. 2% glutaraldehyde, for a period of time, as indicated in the manufacturer's instructions. Failure to use the high level disinfectant after one client could expose the next one to a BBP. Because of possible toxic effects to the practitioner when using glutaraldehyde, e.g. vapours, the product must be used carefully.

The ear piercing gun should be used only for piercing the fleshy part of the ear lobes. The gun is not suitable for piercing other parts of the body such as the navel, the nasal cartilage, or the cartilage areas of the ear. The action of the ear piercing gun can damage tissue and create a risk for later infection.

2. Skin Piercing Needles

Pre-sterilized single-use needles should be used for each client. The gauge of needle depends on the size of the Jewelry to be inserted and the piercing site. If the needle is contaminated before or during use, it must be replaced by another sterile needle.

Infection Prevention for Electrolysis

The critical items for infection risk during electrolysis are the electrolysis needle, the forceps used to hold the hair, and the hypodermic needle that should be used to lift or remove ingrown hairs. Each of these three items enters the deep layers of the skin and therefore is classified as a critical item that must be sterilized.

The pin device and needle holder tip are classified as semi-critical items because they hold or have direct contact with the sterile electrolysis needle. Reusable semi-critical items must undergo high level disinfection. The availability of a single-use combination unit (needle and needle holder tip/cap) eliminates the need to disinfect the needle tip holder. Disposing of both the needle and the cap reduces the risk of transmitting BBPs.

Source:

Canada Communicable Disease Report, Infection Prevention and Control Practices for Personal Services: Tattooing, Ear/Body Piercing, and Electrolysis, Infection Control Guidelines, (July 1999).

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Further details are available at: www.publichealth.gc.ca

Ask your Broker for a brochure on:

- Tanning Safety Guidelines

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Infection Prevention and Control Practices for Personal Services:

- Tattooing
- Ear/Body Piercing
- Electrolysis



Infection Prevention and Control Practices for Personal Services: Tattooing, Ear/Body Piercing, and Electrolysis

Why Develop Infection Prevention and Control Practices or Guidelines?

The national guidelines were developed to reduce the spread of infections, including infections from bloodborne pathogens (BBPs), in Canadians. Transmission of BBPs, e.g. hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), can occur from exposure to infected blood/body fluids.

Infection Control for a Safe Business

1. The Shop

The design of the physical space for skin piercing procedures should be simple, organized, and clean. When practitioners are designing a shop, renovating, or moving into an existing space, they should contact the local health department or municipality for shop requirements and any regulations or standards.

2. Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization

a) Cleaning Instruments and Equipment

Contaminated instruments should be cleaned in the dirty zone, preferably in a utility sink. Cleaning removes soil and body materials, e.g. blood, from instruments, equipment, and environmental surfaces. Cleaning **must** occur as a first step before the disinfection or sterilization process, or the disinfection or sterilization will be ineffective.

b) Cleaning the Environment

It is important to keep the shop clean, as this reduces the chance of cross contamination during skin piercing procedures. Pay special attention to work surfaces that may become contaminated by used instruments or equipment, or surfaces touched by the practitioner's unclean hands.

c) Disinfection

In Canada, all disinfectants are registered and given a drug identification number (DIN). This means the manufacturer has to support the claims about which microorganisms the disinfectant kills and its safety for use. When you buy a disinfectant, ask the manufacturer to give you a material safety data sheet (MSDS), which gives information about use of the product and worker safety.

d) Sterilization

All items that pierce the skin **must** be sterile. Single-use needles purchased as sterile must be used before the expiry date and should not be reused or resterilized. Skin piercing objects, jewelry, and direct instrument attachments, e.g. needle bar for tattooing, forceps and tweezers for electrolysis, must be sterilized by the practitioner.

Any sterile instruments that are accidentally touched or are contaminated in any other way, either before or during treatment, should be replaced by another sterile instrument or needle.

All items for sterilization must be **pre-cleaned** and appropriately packaged prior to sterilization. Wiping instruments with disinfectants does not sterilize them. Successful steam/heat sterilization depends on time, temperature, pressure (in the autoclave), and full contact with the item to be sterilized.

3. Infection Prevention Practices for the Practitioner

Once items are cleaned, disinfected and sterilized, the practitioner should keep equipment and instruments free of contamination. Clean and aseptic procedures are dependent on the practices of the practitioners.

4. Skin Care Before and After the Piercing

Skin preparation before skin piercing procedures should involve a skin inspection and cleaning with an antiseptic.

5. Waste Disposal

The waste generated in a skin piercing shop should be segregated and disposed of according to municipal/provincial regulations.

6. Client Records

A record of each skin piercing procedure should be kept, including the client's name, date of birth, address, phone number, date of procedure, practitioner's name and site of procedure. Information contained in records may be useful if any infection occurs. Records should be kept in accordance with local requirements and, if not stated, for a minimum period of one year.

Infection Prevention in Tattooing

The most critical item for infection risk during tattooing is the set of needles mounted in the needlebar. Needles must not be cleaned in the ultrasonic cleaner and reused with a new colour, as the needles are not sterile. Needles cannot be sterilized for reuse because their very close placement to each other when soldered onto the needlebar means that they cannot be adequately cleaned (even if the ultrasonic cleaning device is used). Because the needles have contact with the client's bloodstream in tissue under the skin, the **sterile needles must be used only for one tattooing session, on only one client**. Used needles should be carefully removed from the needlebar to reduce the risk of needlestick injury to the practitioner and placed in the sharps container.

Careful handling of the tattoo needles during the procedure reduces infection risk.

CAUTION: Some individuals may have an allergic reaction to even the most pure and non-toxic pigments. If the client shows any type of allergic reaction during the tattooing process, e.g. paleness, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, undue swelling, or puffiness around the eyes, the tattooing process should be stopped and immediate emergency medical attention should be obtained.