Tattooing and body piercings are becoming very popular with people over the last 10 years. According to the American Academy of Dermatology 24% of respondents ages 18-50 years had a tattoo. Sixteen percent (16%) had their first tattoo before the age of 18.

A tattoo is made by puncturing the skin with a needle and ink/pigment is injected into the area. To ensure a long lasting tattoo the ink is injected into the second, deeper layer of skin called the dermis. The ink is injected about 1/8 inch (3 millimeters) into your skin.

What should I do prior to having a tattoo?

- A tattoo is a wound that needs to be taken care of to prevent infection. Like any other cut, scrap or puncture, a tattoo is at risk for infectious diseases.
- Ensure immunization is up to date (especially hepatitis B and tetanus shots). There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C or HIV.
- Plan where you will get medical care if your tattoo becomes infected, prolonged bleeding or becomes pus filled or changes in your skin colour around the tattoo
- Talk to your doctor if you have any medical problems such as heart disease, allergies, diabetes, skin disorders, infections, if pregnant, or have a condition that affects your immune system.
- Ensure the parlour has been inspected by a health inspector from Public Health Infectious Disease Team. You can ask the operator to see those reports.

How do I choose a studio?

- Autoclave and/or sterilizer – It’s very important that artists sterilize all instruments that are meant to puncture the skin and will come into contact blood or body fluids.
- A hand washing sink, cleaners and surface disinfectants, and skin antiseptics must be available and used with each tattooing/body piercing procedure.
- Records should show the autoclave is being tested bi-weekly. You can also ask to see these records.
- New, sterile needles are used each time and then thrown out in a “sharps” container.
- Only sterile, individually pre-packed instruments are used for each tattooing/body piercing procedure, and opened in front of you.
- Disposable items such as razors, ink caps, swabs, gloves are only to be used once and then tossed.
- Only fresh ink is used for tattooing and poured into disposable caps in front of you.
- The artist always wears disposable gloves and changes them after touching anything that might not be sterile. Hands are always washed before putting new gloves on.
- Only clean (if possible, sterile) dressings can cover the new tattooed/pierced area.

How do I choose an artist?

- The artist is willing to show you all areas of the studio and can confidently answer all your questions, including those about sterilization methods.
- The artist has a portfolio of his/her work available for you to see.
- The artist is not under the influence of alcohol or drugs while working on you. You shouldn’t be either. Some drugs can cause you to bleed more and interfere with healing as well as interfering with your good judgment.
- The artist discusses aftercare instructions with you and offers written after care instructions for you to take with you.
How to care for the tattoo?

• Taking care of the tattoo until it fully heals is important. Follow the instruction the studio provides to make sure it heals properly. Know the signs of infection such as pain, spreading redness, swelling, or draining of pus and contact a doctor right away if you see or feel any signs of infection.

• Allow up to 2 weeks for healing

What are the Health Risks?

- Bleeding and infection
- Possible transmission of HIV, Hepatitis B and C
- Possible bacterial infections
- Dermatitis (severe skin irritation)
- Possible allergic reactions to the tattoo ink
- Permanent
- Societal values- judging
- Pain/discomfort
- Mistakes may result in nerve damage,
- Tattoos in the small of the back area (Tramp stamp), may mean not being able to have an epidural during childbirth

Do It Yourself Tattoo Kits

The internet offers everything...including home tattoo kits. For anywhere from $40.00 to $200.00 one can order a kit and it will be shipped directly to your home.

It is a little scary given all the risks that are associated with tattooing.

These kits do not come with information on infection prevention nor do they include sufficient after care instruction. There is a huge potential for sharing needles which would increase the risk of acquiring Hepatitis B and C as well as HIV.

These kits are much cheaper than going to an experienced artist so they are very attractive to teens. There is also no age limit for acquiring one of these kits, whereas there is a moral code of ethics among artists to only provide services to teens under the age of 18 with written consent by the parent/guardian who must be present in the shop at the time of signing. There are no regulations as to a minimum age.

If you are considering a tattoo, you should plan ahead and do some reading. The Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit at www.hnhu.org has information on “tattoo guidelines” and “tattooing and piercings” that are found under Infectious Disease.

References:

• Sexualityandu
• Kids Health
• Toronto Public Health
• Health Canada
• Canadian Journal of Public Health

Discussion Topics for the Classroom on Tattooing

1. Would you ever get a tattoo while under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Why or why not.

2. Who are you most likely to take with you to get a tattoo? Friend, parent, sibling, go alone?

3. Would you get a tattoo knowing your parents disapprove? Why or why not.

4. When you see yourself 10 years from now, is the tattoo you envision still a part of the picture?

5. Do you know someone who got a tattoo and then disliked it or wanted to alter or get rid of it?


7. What are some of the reasons why teens and young adults get tattoos.
Risks of tattooing

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Transmission of HIV, Hepatitis B and C
- Dermatitis
- Allergic Reactions
- Scarring
- Permanent
- Judging
- Pain
- Discomfort
- Mistakes

**Think Before You Ink - Quiz**

1) Can you get HIV/AIDS from dirty tattoo needles?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know

2) Can you get Hepatitis from dirty tattoo needles?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know

3) Can you get tetanus from dirty tattoo needles?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know

4) True or False: You should ask for a clean, unused needle when you get tattooed; one cleaned in an autoclave is not good enough.
   - True
   - False

5) True or False: You can have an allergic reaction to tattoo ink.
   - True
   - False

6) True or False: Most tattoo parlors will tattoo teens without even asking for consent.
   - True
   - False

7) True or False: In the end, it doesn’t matter what others think of your tattoo as long as you like it.
   - True
   - False

8) Tattoos can cause problems in MRI machines because of:
   - Metallic pigments in the ink
   - Abnormal blood flow through the tattooed skin
   - The immune system’s response to the tattoo

9) Tattoo artists sterilize their equipment in:
   - A sink
   - A dishwasher
   - An autoclave
Clinic Schedule

**Haldimand**

Cayuga Secondary School  | 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month
Dunnville Secondary School  | 2nd Wednesday of the month
Hagersville Secondary School  | 3rd Thursday of the month
Nurse Practitioner available in the Caledonia office 2nd Wednesday of the month by appt only

**Norfolk**

Waterford District Secondary School  | 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month
Delhi District Secondary School  | 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month
Valley Heights Secondary School  | 4th Thursday of the month
Nurse practitioner available in the Simcoe/Langton offices Monday – Friday by appt only

All of the listed clinics require an appointment. Please call:

- Terri Hartwick, RN, BScN, Caledonia 905-318-5367 Ext. 346
- Margot Fournier, RN, BScN, Simcoe 519-426-6170 Ext. 3225

For an appointment with Kristal Pitter, RN(EC), BScN, our Nurse Practitioner, please call 519-426-6170 Ext. 3246 or 519-875-4485 Ext. 1851.

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**Public Health Nurses in your School**

Your Public Health Nurse will be in your high school once a week. Please look for her.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nurse</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sabine Murphy</td>
<td>Delhi District Secondary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sabine Murphy</td>
<td>Waterford District Secondary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angie Swick</td>
<td>Simcoe Composite School</td>
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<td>Lynda Burville</td>
<td>Valley Heights Secondary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gillian Raffay</td>
<td>Holy Trinity Catholic High School</td>
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<td>Leia Bulosan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frances deBoer</td>
<td>Mackinnon Park Secondary School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Word Search Answer Key**

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**Think Before You Ink-Quiz- Answers**

1) Yes
2) Yes
3) Yes
4) True
5) True
6) False
7) False
8) Metallic pigments in the ink
9) An autoclave