
Home tattooing

Summary

- Home tattooing is not safe and can put you at risk of serious infections.
 - Performing home tattoos on yourself or your friends may be illegal in some cases.
 - Getting a tattoo overseas (even in a professional tattoo shop) may not be safe.
 - The safest way to get tattoos is from professional tattoo premises that are registered with your local council in Australia.
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Tattoos are common, with one in four young people aged between 20-29 years having a tattoo in Australia. To get a tattoo, a needle containing ink is inserted into the skin multiple times. Getting a tattoo can cause complications such as infections and allergic reactions.

To reduce risk, it is important that tattoos are performed properly by trained professional tattoo artists.

Certain aspects of home tattooing can be illegal. In Victoria, it is not legal to tattoo a person under 18 years of age.

Getting a tattoo overseas may also not be safe, particularly in some countries in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America. Other countries may not have the same infection prevention and control requirements for tattoo premises that are required in Australia. Therefore, getting a tattoo performed overseas, even in professional tattoo shops, may carry similar risks to home tattooing.

Risks of home tattooing equipment

Buying your own tattoo equipment (for example, over the internet) and performing tattoos on yourself or on friends is not safe. It is also not safe to let a friend tattoo you. Appropriate training and equipment is necessary to ensure that tattooing procedures are clean and equipment is sterile.

Without this, you are putting you and your friends at greater risk of serious infectious diseases such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), or skin infections.

Hepatitis B and hepatitis C can cause liver disease, including cirrhosis and liver cancer. In addition, tattoo equipment and inks purchased cheaply over the internet may be of poor quality. Poor quality inks may contain harmful substances that remain permanently in your skin. The safest way to get a tattoo is at a registered (licensed) tattoo premises.

Home tattooing is not regulated

Home tattooing, also known as DIY tattooing or backyard tattooing, is any tattooing that is performed outside of registered tattoo premises. Getting a home tattoo puts your health at risk, because the procedures in place to ensure clean and safe tattooing in registered premises do not occur.

Amateur tattooists who perform home tattoos generally do not have proper infection prevention and control training. This training is expected of professional tattoo artists who work from registered tattoo premises, and who are required by law to provide cleanliness and sterile tattooing equipment.

The risks of home tattooing

Getting any tattoo carries some health risks. However, performing your own tattoos puts you at greater risk of:

- contracting serious infectious diseases, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV
- contracting severe skin infections, including bacterial infections such as 'golden staph'
- using poor quality tattooing equipment and inks containing substances that may have long-term health effects
- getting a tattoo of poor quality that does not look good
- scarring from skin infections or poor tattooing technique.

Effects of these complications can be debilitating and life-long. Subsequent removal of unwanted tattoos is not always successful, and is also associated with health risks, including scarring and further infections.

Similar precautions should be taken if you are considering getting a tattoo overseas. In particular, the chance of getting a serious infection such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV may be much higher in other countries where infection prevention and control requirements for tattooists are not as stringent, and the occurrence of these diseases in the local population is higher.

Home tattooing and the law

Current Victorian legislation states that it is not legal to:

- tattoo anyone under the age of 18 years in Victoria
- conduct an unregistered tattoo business where you receive payment in exchange for performing tattoos (if you are not working in a registered tattoo premises)
- tattoo someone else without using clean and sterile equipment, which can put their health at risk.

Performing any of these illegal activities can leave you open to criminal charges.

Reducing the risks of home tattooing

- Do not purchase your own tattooing equipment for home use.
- Do not perform tattoos on yourself or your friends.
- Do not let friends tattoo you.
- Wait until you are 18 years old (the legal age) before getting a tattoo.
- Only receive tattoos from professional tattoo premises that are registered with your local council.
- If you become aware of home tattooing occurring, report this to your local council or the police.
- Avoid getting tattoos in other countries outside Australia, particularly in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America.

Where to get help

- Your doctor, for advice and referral
- Your local council for advice on registered tattooing premises
- Hepatitis Victoria info line Tel. 03 9380 4644
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)

Things to remember

- Home tattooing is not safe and can put you at risk of serious infections.
- Performing home tattoos on yourself or your friends may be illegal in some cases.
- Getting a tattoo overseas (even in a professional tattoo shop) may not be safe.
- The safest way to get tattoos is from professional tattoo premises that are registered with your local council in Australia.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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