TATTOO SAFETY
How to protect yourself and others

What risks are the with getting a tattoo in jail or prison?

Getting a tattoo outside of a licensed tattoo shop increases your risk of get an infection. Without properly sterilizing equipment between uses, there is a high risk of bacterial and viral infections.

Improper or unhygienic storage of equipment can lead to build up of bacteria on equipment that can enter the skin and cause an infection.

Tattoo equipment comes into contact with blood, which means if equipment is shared it can put you at risk of blood borne infections like hepatitis C, hepatitis B, and HIV.

What materials put me at risk?

Anything that comes into contact with blood can be a risk and everything used to give someone a tattoo is likely to come in contact with their blood.

- Needle
- Gun
- Barrel
- Poker
- String
- Ink
- Ink Pot
- Gloves

After needles, the most common way that infections are passed is through shared ink or ink pots.

How can I protect myself?

Most people don’t know that all equipment used for tattooing, not just needles, can come into contact with blood, so make sure that you talk to your artist before getting a tattoo to make sure that all the equipment they are using is brand new.

The safest way to prevent yourself from getting an infection from a tattoo is to always use brand new equipment and never share any tattoo equipment with anyone.

How can I reduce my risk?

It is not always possible to get access to brand new equipment for every single tattoo you get, so the best way to reduce your risk of getting an infection is to make sure to properly clean and sterilize all tattoo equipment between uses.

Rinsing in alcohol or bleach or heating with a lighter or candle are not enough to guarantee that all the blood borne infections are killed. Bleach can kill bacteria and HIV, but not hepatitis C.

The best way to reduce your risk of blood borne infection is to thoroughly rinse all equipment with cold, clean water (5 times is best) to get rid of the blood.

There is no way to eliminate your risk of getting an infection through cleaning and sterilizing alone, but proper cleaning and sterilization of equipment is the best way to reduce the likelihood of bacteria or viruses hanging out on your equipment.

What else can I do?

Bag your gun. Blood splatter from the needle rapidly poking the skin may not be visible but is one way that someone may be exposed to blood. Make sure to use a plastic bag or screen on your gun, the tubes, and the barrel to reduce the blood that can come in contact with your equipment.

Never re-use ink or ink pots. Have clients bring their own ink or their own ink pot that has never been used by anyone else. Have a communal ink pot that you never dip a needle into and you never pour ‘leftover’ ink back into. Personal ink pots could be a pencil eraser, a toothpaste cap, or a water bottle cap.

Never re-use barrels or wrapping string. Anything that holds the needle in place is at risk of coming in contact with blood splatter. Find a reliable, trusted source to get brand new barrels every time, or bring your own.

Wear new gloves every time. This will reduce the risk of indirect blood-to-blood contact between different clients and also reduce the risk of exposure between artist and client.

I got a tattoo already, what should I do?

- If you already have a tattoo from prison, jail, or on the street, get tested.
- Understand the institutional code of conduct around tattooing before getting tested.
- Remember to get tested every three months if you are exposed to blood on a regular basis.

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