



# SMARTER BODY ART

HELPING PEOPLE  
STAY HEALTHY

 hepatitis ACT

The background is a solid teal color with several overlapping circular patterns of varying sizes and opacities, creating a layered, abstract effect.

# SAFER BODY ART

Hepatitis B and C are viruses that affect the liver. They are in blood, and are transmitted when the blood of an infected person enters another person's bloodstream. The process of getting a body piercing or tattoo involves blood, and results in an open wound being created. These conditions can enable the transmission of the hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV viruses as there is an opportunity for blood-to-blood contact to occur.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Body art practices, such as piercing and tattooing, can put you at risk. There are rules and guidelines that approved body artists (body piercers and tattooists) should follow to prevent transmission of blood borne viruses. If a body artist is not confident in talking about

infection control measures, you should seriously consider going somewhere else.

## STERILISATION

Equipment used during the tattooing or piercing procedures should be single use and new, or sterilised in accordance with industry standards if the item is approved for re-use. Everything that the body artist is going to need during the process should be readily

available and within reach. Single use needles should be opened from their packet in front of you.

'Backyard operators' and professional artists in some other countries may not follow these requirements.

## **BLOOD CONTAMINATION**

Hepatitis B and C can live outside the body for several days. Even a very small amount of blood can contain enough of the virus to pose a transmission risk. There is more to safe body art than clean needles!

- Razors are often used to shave the skin in preparation for a tattoo or piercing. These must also be single use. A razor may nick or cut the skin. If the same razor nicks the skin of two different people blood-to-blood contact can occur.

- The tattooist or piercer should be wearing gloves. Anything the tattooist or piercer touches during the procedure comes into contact with blood. If for any reason the body artist has a break from the procedure, they should wash their hands and put

on new gloves before resuming the work.

- The bench area, chair and other fixtures should be clean. Most tattooists and piercers cover chairs and benches with plastic and other items with cling film, which they change between appointments.

## **TATTOOING AND THE AGE OF CONSENT**

In the ACT it is against the law to tattoo a person under the age of 18 without written permission of their parent or carer. If someone is prepared



to disregard this legal requirement they may also disregard legal requirements relating to safe practices.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK PRIOR TO HAVING A PROCEDURE

Am I sure this is what I want?

What is the artist's level of experience or training?

Does the artist take steps to prevent the transmission of blood borne viruses?

Do they:

- Wash their hands?
- Use new gloves before starting a procedure?
- Change gloves during the procedure if for any reason they are interrupted?
- Use sterilise needles, instruments and jewellery opened in your presence?

When you're talking to the artist about all the finer points of body art, be sure to discuss infection control measures and other safety issues. Remember, if a tattooist or piercer seems uneasy talking about

infection control, or makes you feel uneasy asking about it, then you should seriously consider going elsewhere.

Never have any body art done unless you're sure it's safe, even if it means you have to wait a bit longer and save more cash. The risk of contracting hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV is serious and could be life threatening..

**For more information contact  
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or [info@hepatitisACT.org.au](mailto:info@hepatitisACT.org.au)**

# Kids' tattoo

## Minors catch hepa

**Elissa Doherty**

TATTOO-obsessed school children are contracting hepatitis C and being left with nasty scars after getting inked illegally at dodgy parlours.

As the tattoo trend skyrockets, young teens and 12-year-olds are turning to laser tattoo removal after using cheap DIY tattoo kits bought on the internet.

And it is costing their parents dearly.

The number of people being caught for tattooing minors is rising amid calls from industry and medical

experts for tougher restrictions.

It is an offence in Victoria to tattoo a person under 18.

A *Herald Sun* investigation has found that some studios are illegally tattooing children as young as 13, doing them after hours or charging extra.

Police figures reveal nine offences for tattooing minors in the last financial year, and a total of 24 since 2002-03.

Instant Laser Clinic direc-

tor Mathew Jafarzadeh said he had treated a girl, 16, who had contracted hepatitis C after getting her boyfriend's name tattooed on her wrist. "She was very, very upset; it was quite devastating for her," he said.

"This can be a recipe for disaster. I've seen people who have had backyard jobs and been contaminated.

"They can fail to do the proper sterilisation, or use blunt needles, or go too deep and leave scars."

# os alarm atitis C from illegal inking

Professional Tattooing Association of Australia national secretary Patsy Farrow said better controls were needed.

"The DIY kits are an absolute nightmare," she said. "You can pick up a starter kit for a lousy \$100.

"I get parents ringing up about their 13-year-old daughter who got a tattoo from a mate down the road.

"We get people coming in saying: 'Can you fix this monstrosity, cover it up?'"

She said one "backyarder" had been tattooing young teens with parents' permission and charging an extra \$50.

"That made my blood boil," Ms Farrow said.

Rick Johnson, owner of Geelong's Xtreme Ink Tattoo Studio, said other studios were trying to skirt authorities by tattooing minors after hours.

"It's happening a lot more, backyarders or shops that aren't that busy," he

said. "I'm seeing kids who are 15 with full sleeves. It's ridiculous."

He said parents were also asking for their under-age children to get tattooed: "They need a wake-up call."

Dr Garth Dicker, of the Cosmetic and Laser Medical Centre, had to remove a tattoo from a 12-year-old boy who had used a home kit to etch himself.

"We see an increasing number of parents bringing kids in with these kinds of tattoos," he said. "It is concerning that they are tattooing themselves, as there is the risk of infection."

# HEPATITIS C

## WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis is the general name for several different illnesses which all cause the same problem: inflammation (swollen or painful) of the liver. Hepatitis C is a virus that does this. It can be found in the blood. There is treatment for hepatitis C which is effective for most people. Left untreated, hepatitis C can cause serious liver damage, liver failure and liver cancer.



## HOW IS HEPATITIS C TRANSMITTED?

The hepatitis C virus can only be spread through blood-to-blood contact. This means that the blood of an infected person needs to enter the bloodstream of another. This can happen through:

- Unsterile tattooing or piercing
- Sharing injecting equipment
- Unsterile medical or dental procedures

- Sharing items like razors, toothbrushes and nail clippers, and
- Medical/dental and body art procedures performed overseas can carry additional risks.

## ARE THERE OTHER WAYS IT CAN BE SPREAD?

You can't get it from hugging, kissing, sharing crockery or utensils, mosquitoes, sneezing

or coughing. However, all blood should be treated as infectious, that's why there is a 'blood rule' in sport – just to be on the safe side.

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

The only way to find out if you've got hepatitis C is to have a blood test or finger stick test. Most people who have hepatitis C won't experience any symptoms for 10-15 years after they have contracted the virus.

## HOW DO YOU AVOID GETTING HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a resilient virus. It can survive outside the body for days. It is also a very small virus which can be present in tiny amounts of blood, invisible to the eye.

You can do these things to avoid getting hepatitis C :

- Do not share tattooing or injecting equipment
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, sex toys and other personal items
- Use condoms during sex
- Use gloves to dress a wound and to clean blood spills and other body fluids, and
- Avoid sex where blood is present.

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# HEPATITIS B

## WHAT IS HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B is a blood borne virus and sexually transmissible infection that affects the liver. ('Hepatitis' means 'inflammation of the liver')

Many people who have hepatitis B don't notice any symptoms. Symptoms can develop within six to twelve weeks of infection and can last for a few days to a few weeks. Symptoms can include a mild flu-like illness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, dark urine, fatigue, general aches and pains, and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice).

## IS HEPATITIS B DIFFERENT TO HEPATITIS C?

Some major differences between hepatitis B & C are:

- Hepatitis C is only transmitted by blood
- Hepatitis B is transmitted in blood and body fluids such as semen and vaginal fluids and
- There is a vaccination to prevent hepatitis B and there is no vaccination for hepatitis C.

Both are 'notifiable diseases'. This means doctors are legally required to tell ACT Health about new cases. This information is confidential and is used for public health planning.

## HOW IS HEPATITIS B TRANSMITTED?

Hepatitis B can be transmitted by:

- Unprotected sex
- Penetrating the skin with unsterile equipment

(including tattooing, body piercing, sharing needles & syringes as well as other equipment for injecting drugs, needle stick injuries, and other unsterile procedures)

- Sharing toothbrushes, razors, sex toys or other items that may have blood on them
- If blood from a person with hepatitis B makes direct contact with an open wound of another person, and
- Mother-to-child transmission during birth. In Australia most



people living with chronic hepatitis B were infected at birth.

Hepatitis B is **NOT** transmitted by casual contact such as hugging, holding hands, kissing (as long as there is no blood), coughing, sneezing, sharing food or sharing utensils such as knives, forks or chopsticks.

Like hepatitis C, you can't tell if someone has the virus by looking at them. People with chronic hepatitis B may look and feel well, but the infection can still be transmitted to others. Chronic hepatitis B infection

slowly damages the liver, so some people with this condition may eventually suffer liver failure or cancer of the liver, particularly if left undiagnosed or untreated.

## HOW DO YOU AVOID GETTING HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B can be prevented:

- Get vaccinated. You can check with your parents/ carers or talk to your doctor to see if you've been vaccinated

- Do not share tattooing or injecting equipment
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, sex toys and other personal items
- Use condoms during sex
- Use gloves to dress a wound and to clean blood spills and other body fluids, and
- Avoid sex where blood is present.

Hepatitis B can be infectious for six months before symptoms are noticeable. Your doctor can help you decide who else may be at risk if you test positive.

## HOW DO YOU FIND OUT IF YOU HAVE IT?

Hepatitis B is detected by a blood test. This can show if a person has a recent infection. It can also show if they currently have a chronic infection or have had hepatitis B in the past. Blood tests and other assessments can check for damage to the liver.

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# THERE IS NO VACCINE FOR HEP C


For information and  
support about hepatitis  
and prevention

 hepatitisACT

**AVOID BACKYARD  
TATTOOING &  
PIERCING,  
UNSAFE  
INJECTING,  
SHARING RAZORS  
& TOOTHBRUSHES**

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The background is a solid teal color with several large, white, stylized spiral patterns scattered across it. The spirals are composed of concentric, slightly irregular circular shapes that create a sense of movement and depth.

[www.hepatitisACT.org.au](http://www.hepatitisACT.org.au)  
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