

Tattooing

A tattoo is a form of body modification that involves the insertion of dyes or inks into the skin using a needle in order to create a permanent image or design. A tattoo can be placed on almost every part of the skin, although eyeball (scleral) tattoos are prohibited.

Infection Risks

Microorganisms can enter the tissue under the skin or mucous membrane at the tattoo site and cause an infection. The potential sources of these microorganisms are:

- Contaminated or improperly reprocessed equipment or ink
- Tap water used to dilute the ink.
- The client's own bacteria on the skin.
- Unclean hands touching the treated area.

The result may be localized skin infections caused by bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus* or *Mycobacterium spp.* or *Streptococcus spp.* Contaminated tattoo inks have been implicated in outbreaks of bacterial infection.

Additional Considerations

Equipment:

- All needles, dermal punches and single-use scalpel blades are to be maintained as sterile until point of use and discarded in an appropriate biohazard (sharps) container after use.
- All reusable equipment/instruments/items are to be reprocessed after use.
- Items that are not able to be reprocessed are to be discarded after use (e.g., plastic ink caps).
- Single-use ink caps provided in bulk are to be disinfected prior to use.
- All supplies required for the tattoo procedure are to be assembled and set-up immediately prior to the procedure.
- Surfaces or items that cannot be disinfected, or that may be touched during a procedure, are to be covered with a single-use plastic covering (e.g., tattoo machine, spray bottles, cords, rinse bottles).
- Materials used for dressings are to be kept in a cleanable rigid container with a tight fitting lid in order to protect these from contamination.
- If a cartridge style tattoo machine pen is used, needle cartridges must be equipped with a form of backflow prevention.
- Leftover inks, petroleum jelly and other items dispensed during the tattoo procedure are to be discarded and are not to be reused.

Client Safety:

- Operators are not to tattoo a client's body if nearby skin (within 15 cm (6 inches)) has a rash or is inflamed or infected; if this cannot be done, operators are to defer service until the area has healed.
- If a client's skin is visibly soiled, it is to be cleaned with soap and water before the procedure.
- If hair removal is required, a single-use razor is to be used and discarded in an approved biohazard (sharps) container after use.
- Operators are to clean the procedure site with an approved skin antiseptic before applying topical anesthetic (if applicable). Injectable anaesthetics are not to be used.
- Before performing the procedure, operators are to apply skin antiseptic to the client's skin.
- If a stencil transfer is required, skin is to be cleaned and an appropriate stencil transfer solution used (e.g., deodorant sticks are not to be used).
- Prior to tattooing the mouth or tongue, operators are to ensure the client's mouth is clean. Prior to tattooing genital areas, operators are to clean the site using water and a liquid soap.
- If inks are diluted, sterile water is to be used. Tap water is not to be used.
- Following completion of the procedure, operators are to cover the tattooed area with a single-use, non-adhesive dressing that is intended to cover wounds.
- Dressings that are not intended to cover wounds (e.g., meat pads) are not to be used.
- Clients are to be provided with verbal and written aftercare information following the procedure, including a recommendation to see a family doctor within 24 hours if any signs of infection develop.

Reprocessing Classification

Critical	Non-critical	Various
<i>Sterilization</i>	<i>Low-Level Disinfection</i>	<i>Single-Use, Disposable</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable grips, and tips • Reusable ink caps (metal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tables, chairs, beds • Rigid containers used to hold dirty equipment until reprocessing (at end of day) • Service trays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bandages to cover tattoos • Elastic bands • Lubricant applicators • Tattoo needles* • Needle cartridges* • Plastic covers • Razors • Single use ink caps** • Stencils • Single-use rinse cups • Ointment applicators • Single-use personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, gowns, eye protection) • Wipes, tissues, and dental bibs

*These items are to be sterile prior to use

** These items are to be intermediate-level disinfected prior to use.

Sources

1. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). [Guide to infection prevention and control in personal service settings](#). 3rd ed. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2018

This fact sheet is based on PSS best practice recommendations, current reprocessing standards and legislation. It is not an inclusive list of all requirements. Operators are responsible to ensure that all services are offered according to local requirements, best practices and legislation.