

SAFE TATTOOING

Tattooing is a popular art form that many men and women in prison participate in. If the work is done safely, by a skilled artist who values both their art and the health of their customers, tattooing is an activity that can give a lot of happiness and pride to the artist and customer alike. **However, if proper precautions are not followed, tattooing can be a high risk for the spread of diseases like Hepatitis C and HIV.**

CHOOSING AN ARTIST

Everyone likes to get tattoos in prison, and that's good because a lot of the best artists are in prison - artists that take pride in their work, and do mega-detail! When you're entering a prison, take your time before getting tattooed. Too many people want to *hurry, hurry, hurry*. Well, don't rush, because the people who do only end up later looking for a good artist to cover up the *hurry, hurry* crap. The artist should make sure that the art work the person wants is what they will get. If you're getting a tattoo, make sure you check out as much of the artist's

work as possible to make sure he or she knows what they're doing. Take your time when looking for a tattoo, and in picking an artist to do it for you. If you can, try to see the artist in action first, and watch what he or she does. This can really help you make good decisions.

SAFE TOOLS

In here it's very hard to ensure that the equipment (needles, shaft, ink) is clean. The only way to be sure is to have the tattoo artist make the new needle in front of you.

When doing a tattoo, everything the artist uses should be brand new. To make sure of this, **the artist that you choose should be able to make up everything in front of you - the needle, shaft for the ink, and tip for the needle.** For this, the tattoo artist needs to be adept at making the equipment fast. If the artist can't make the needle in front of you, tell him or her to drift. Even these precautions cannot guarantee a safe tattoo. A simple pen or lighter can be used for a tip and shaft. A pack of guitar strings can make endless needles for the price of a few dollars. An easy way to sharpen them is with a small piece of sandpaper stuck to your fan, or by hand using slow pull-away and turn motions. The needle should

be razor sharp - the shorter the point, the longer the needle will stay sharp. The artist should also wear latex gloves.

If you have to boil your equipment, do so for 15 minutes, with bleach if you have it. The best system I have found is to make everything brand new each time and boil it, and afterwards clean it with alcohol and let the person who got the work done keep the works. By making the customer responsible for their own personal works, they can get more work done later (if the piece isn't finished yet) and be positive that no one else has used them.

SAFE INKS

You trust your life on the ink you use. Just because someone tells you the ink they're using is brand new doesn't mean anything, because you can't see the HIV virus or Hep C virus. You can't tell by looking if the ink is clean or not.

Getting ink is a big problem within prison. CSC banned ink in their efforts to curb tattooing practices. This makes it hard to get. You can make your own ink by burning paper and mixing it with water to make a thick paste - then away you go! The artist should mix the ink in front of you, so you know it's disease free.

The standard practice for the serious tattoo artist is to obtain a sealed bottle of ink from somewhere (use your imagination!) and use that. **Reusing or sharing ink is very high risk for disease transmission (Hep C and HIV)!**

SAFE WORK

When using a home-made prison tattoo gun, make sure that the area you're working on is flat and that you're holding the gun straight on. This will make the ink flow to the spot you're working on and stay there until you wipe it off. Never hold your gun on a tilt. This causes blotching and infection, and it doesn't do a lot of good for the tattoo either. Make sure that a new toothpaste cap is used, or styrofoam cup or whatever, and that it's cleaned with alcohol. The tattooist should not break through all the layers of skin. If they do it can result in infection and heavy scarring. There will always be a little scarring - remember, you're punching millions of holes to make a piece, but the ink will cover that. The heavy scarring I'm talking about - which seems to be abundant in prison - is the deep, rutted scarring. You can run your finger lightly over it and feel the indentations left from some butcher calling themselves a

tattoo artist. Any butcher can follow a bunch of lines stencilled on someone's skin - the art comes from the shading, and every tattoo artist has a unique shade. That's the addiction. Because of this, once you've been around a while and seen a lot of work, you should be able to tell who did it - and that's without a signature!

Be aware of cross contamination. This means that anything that comes into contact with a used needle, dirty rag, blood, etc., is contaminated. For example, if the tattoo gun cord comes into contact with blood during a tattoo it is considered contaminated. This could be a risk to the next client receiving a tattoo if it comes into contact with their open tattoo sores. As much as possible the tattooist should protect against cross contamination by using non-microwaveable plastic wrap to cover equipment and working surfaces.

SAFE DISPOSAL

After you've finished a tattoo, you have medical waste. After the job is done, everything you used is waste and should be treated as such. The needle, tube or shaft that the needle goes in, the ink, the ink cap, the gloves, and the new towel that you had at the start which is now black, should

be disposed of. **Don't ever re-use any of the stuff.** You can't take it to health care, so you have to throw it in the garbage.

Make sure you cut the point off the needle and bend it up before you throw it or flush it. This will make sure the garbage person or whoever won't accidentally get stuck by it. This way you know for sure that you're not spreading any diseases. The gloves and rags should also be tossed or flushed and never reused.

BLEACH DOES NOT KILL HEP C

TATTOOING & YOU

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The Safe-Guards Within Prison