



Body Art and Piercing Sites - Potential Risks

Environmental Health Guide

Body Art is a term used to describe procedures undertaken by a person to decorate or adorn the body by means of implantation, or the marking of the skin in a permanent way by means of injection, incision or heat. Current practices include tattooing, body piercing, branding, scarification and body modifications such as braiding and three-dimensional art like beading or devil's horns.

Invasive Body Art where skin penetration takes place using an appliance or instrument (including lasers, needles and intense heat) provides for a higher risk for transmission of blood-born viruses such as hepatitis B, C and HIV, and serious bacterial or fungal infections. Operators undertaking such procedures are required to register with their Local Government and ensure they comply fully with health provisions outlined in the *Health (Skin Penetration Procedure) Regulations 1998* and the *Code of Practice for Skin Penetration Procedures*. Along with Viral, Bacterial and Fungal infections there are real risks of nerve damage and unwanted scarring if the procedures are poorly performed. The below table describes the potential risks known for common piercing sites and other forms of Body Art. For further information on Body Art and piercing please refer to the *Healthy Body Art Brochure* under Facts Sheets.

Piercing sites	Potential risks
Ear piercing-the lobe or the upper cartilaginous parts are the most usual sites. The tragus, the conch and the rook may also be pierced.	. Infection
Nose-the nostril or the septum	. Infection
Mouth/face-lips, tongue, eyebrows, cheeks, chin.	. Potential airway obstruction or difficulty breathing due to swelling from insertion or infection . Interference with speaking and chewing . Possible oral surgery to retrieve lost or submerged objects within the tongue tissue . Mouth irritation or trauma to teeth and gums if inappropriate jewellery is used, including fracture to the enamel and gingival recession . Tongue-nerve damage, severing of large blood vessels, swelling, airway obstruction, increased salivary flow, permanent numbness and loss of taste . Eyebrows-damage to the nerves responsible for eyelid movement . Infection(bacterial, viral and fungal)
Skin surfaces-neck, forearms, wrist	. Rejection, where skin tension puts pressure on the jewellery and leads to rejection . Infection
Navel	. Risk of severe infection if the umbilicus is pierced



Nipple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . From piercing of the female areola, possible effect on ability to breastfeed. . Infection
<p>Genitals Female-clitoris, clitoral hood, labia forchette and triangle</p> <p>Male-urethra, foreskin, frenum, scrotum and the pubic area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Infection <p>Note: It is an offence to pierce the genitals of a minor U16.</p>
Other forms of body art	Potential risks
Scarification and cutting with surgical scalpel or laser to produce scar tissue. Some clients insert foreign matter such as clay or ash into the wounds to achieve permanently raised welts known as keloids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Infection . Rejection of the foreign matter
There is a current trend towards tongue splitting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Speech impediment . Numbness . Loss of taste
Branding using heated surgical steel; cold branding using dry ice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Infection
Braiding by cutting adjacent strips of skin, keeping one end attached and braiding them together(The loose ends are then re-attached to the skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Infection . Skin loss if the reattachments does not take
Beading/three-dimension body art, where the skin is slit and stainless steel beads, rings or other jewellery are implanted beneath the skin. (For devil's horns, Teflon and /or coral inserts are adhered to the skull underneath the skin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Infection . Rejection of the foreign matter

Information taken from page 52, Health Guidelines for Personal Care and Body Art Industries, Victorian Government Publishing Services (2004), State Government of Victoria.

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