

Tattoo safety guidelines ^[1]

Dear Alice:

I am planning to get a tattoo. Can you please give me some guidelines to follow so this can be accomplished safely, as I do not want blood poisoning or any diseases as a result?

— Ink Virgin

Answer

Dear Ink Virgin,

Before you make like a squid and ink yourself ^[2], checking into safety tips on tattooing is a great idea! Your best bet for finding safety-conscious tattoo artists and studios is to call (or visit) and chat with the proprietors. Ask questions about equipment, health and safety regulations, and what they do to meet state guidelines (each state is different — more on that later). Knowing more about how a studio takes care of these issues may help you to minimize safety risks.

First, what might you want to talk with the artist(s) about? Consider asking the following questions before you get a tattoo:

- Do the artists thoroughly wash their hands with antibacterial solution immediately before and after each tattoo application?
- Are gloves worn during the tattooing procedure?
- Can you tell me about the equipment/materials you use? (i.e., each needle and tube set is individually packaged, dated and sealed; autoclave sterilized; sterile single-use disposable needles used; single-use disposable razor used to shave body hair).
- Is there a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulated autoclave on site?
- How do you clean your workspaces?
- How do you dispose of used materials?

You may also want to make yourself aware of different regulations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a lot of information on body art and industry-specific issues ^[3] (such as bloodborne pathogen exposure, hand washing, and sharps disposal). Consider asking if anyone in the shop has been to a bloodborne pathogen training or seminar. The CDC also has a

list of [body art regulations](#) [4] by state that you may want to review. For example, in New York, all studios must have and display a permit. Take a look at your state-specific regulations and see if there are any additional questions you want to ask.

As you conduct your inquiry, take note of their reactions — are they considerate and thorough? Or, are they annoyed by your inquisitiveness? You have a right to have your questions answered thoroughly and in advance. When you get there, check out the studio — make sure it looks and feels clean. If you get there and you're uncomfortable, you can leave.

For additional information, check out the [Alliance of Professional Tattooists, Inc.](#) [5], an organization dedicated to health and safety issues within the tattoo industry. Remember, there are plenty of studios and artists who have their clients' safety and health in mind; you may just need to do a little leg-work and ask the right questions to find them.

Alice!

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