

Safer Tattooing and Piercing

What to look for in...

Professional piercers

- Use jewelry made of surgical steel or niobium
- Do not use piercing guns or stud guns

Professional tattooists

- Pour ink into new, disposable containers
- Use these containers only for your tattoo

Professional piercers and tattooists

- Use new sterile needles every time
- Use latex gloves (or non-latex if requested or if they have an allergy to latex)
- Give instructions afterwards on how to prevent infection
- Are experienced and knowledgeable

Choosing a safe place to get a tattoo or piercing...

Get recommendations from friends. Visit several different shops. Ask to see:

- Special containers for disposing of used needles
- Disposable ink cups for tattoo colours
- Sterilized (closed packages) for needles and ask them to open these in front of you when getting a tattoo
- An autoclave for sterilizing equipment

Ask questions about their experience and safety measures. If you are not satisfied, leave and find another studio.

What to Expect at a Professional Piercing Studio:

- A consent form with your name, age, address, and phone number. The age of consent may vary by province/territory but is generally 16. If you are under 16, you will need a parent or guardian to come with you to sign the consent form.
- The piercer's studio should be clean and all equipment used should be sterilized. Needle packages should be opened in front of you so you can be sure that they are sterilized.
- The piercer should be wearing single use disposable gloves.
- The piercing studio should not allow individuals to come in for their appointments intoxicated.
- Piercers will mark the intended piercing spot with a marker and have you agree on the placement of it before they begin.

- The piercer should use a small needle and will likely put a small amount of lube on it to make sure it passes smoothly through the skin. *For ear piercings, make sure the piercer is not using a piercing gun. While these have been frequently used in the past, recent studies have shown that these devices can transmit infection from previously infected blood and since many are made from plastic, cannot be effectively sterilized.*
- Piercers should only use jewellery that they supply and that has been purchased from their studio. For fresh piercings to heal, it is important that jewellery is the right size (to allow a normal amount of swelling) and made of the right metals.
- The piercer should provide follow-up care instructions, either verbally, in a printed out version, or both, as well as information on how to spot an infection and what to do if infection occurs.

What to Expect at a Professional Tattooing Studio:

- A consent form with your name, age, address, and phone number. The age of consent may vary by province/territory but is generally 18. If you are under 18, you will need a parent or guardian to come with you to sign the consent form.
- The tattoo shop should be clean and any equipment that comes into contact with a client should have a water proof barrier that is changed between clients (i.e., a waterproof sheet that covers a tattooing chair).
- The tattoo shop should not allow individuals to come in for their appointments intoxicated.
- Tattoo needles should be opened in front of you and disposed into a sharps box after every client.
- A talk with your artist to get to know them first. This will indicate whether you are comfortable with them and what to expect when you visit for your tattoo. Check out their portfolio (if they have one) to look at their past artwork.
- Tattoo artists should pour ink into individual small plastic cups and dispose of ink after each client.
- Tattoo artists should wear disposable gloves and change them anytime they leave the work station and touch anything else.
- The tattoo artist should discuss aftercare with you before you leave.