HCV & Tattoos

Foreword

The transmission of HCV by tattooing practices has not been well documented, but there is a very real possibility that a person could become infected this way if precautions are not followed very carefully. Because it is harder to obtain sterile tattooing tools in prisons or on the streets, getting a tattoo in these settings carries a much greater risk of transmitting HCV.

There are regulations in most states regarding the operation of tattoo parlors. Most states restrict tattooing of minors unless written permission is obtained from the parent or guardian. Check with the local or state department of public health about regulations in your area.

The Centers for Disease Control issued the following statement on tattooing and hepatitis C on June 9, 2009:

“A few major research studies have not shown Hepatitis C to be spread through licensed, commercial tattooing facilities. However, transmission of Hepatitis C (and other infectious diseases) is possible when poor infection-control practices are used during tattooing or piercing. Body art is becoming increasingly popular in the United States, and unregulated tattooing and piercing are known to occur in prisons and other informal or unregulated settings. Further research is needed to determine if these types of settings and exposures are responsible for Hepatitis C virus transmission.”

– www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/c/cfaq.htm

Most tattoo artists are very concerned about safety and want to make sure that a customer who receives a tattoo is protected against getting hepatitis C and other blood-borne illnesses.

A study was released in 2010 that found that having a tattoo nearly tripled the risk of having hepatitis C compared to people who did not
have a tattoo. However, the study showed that there was an association only – the actual mode of transmission wasn’t studied.\textsuperscript{1}

**We recommend only commercial tattoo parlors that practice the following precautions:**

- All single use items including ointments, tattoo ink, needles, gloves, trays and any other materials that come into contact with blood should be used only once and discarded in a “sharps” bin or a puncture-proof container.
- Use disposable or new needles.
- Use separate ink pots.
- Reusable materials should be autoclaved. An autoclave is a machine that uses a combination of steam, pressure, and heat to sterilize equipment. There is an indicator on the autoclave machine to verify that the equipment has been sterilized. The tattoo shop should keep a record of the usage and testing of the autoclave. Ask to check the records if there are any doubts about safety.
- A new set of safety gloves are used for each person. The safety gloves should be changed if there is a possibility that the tattoo artist touched any surface.
- The shop is clean and professional – floors, tables, and equipment should all appear clean and disinfected.
- After the tattoo procedure, the tattoo artist will disinfect the work area with an EPA approved disinfection solution.

**Aftercare**

Another important prevention strategy is to make sure that care is given after the tattoo is inked—since blood is involved it is important that the necessary steps are taken to prevent transmission of any blood borne illness. Your tattoo artist will give you instructions to care for your tattoo between visits or after the tattoo has been completed. Be sure to follow the instructions carefully and call your tattoo artist if you develop any type of infection or if you do not understand any of the instructions.

- The artists will apply a thin coat of ointment and bandage the tattoo to protect it—take off the bandage after one to two hours after being inked. This will help the healing process.
- Start to moisturize the tattoo after a couple of days using a fragrance-free moisturizer.
- Do not pick or scratch the tattoo – this could lead to bleeding, infection and scarring.
- Any signs of infection check in with your doctor and artist.

Check with friends for recommendations for shops that practice safe tattooing. Visit the tattoo parlor before committing to a tattoo and ask questions about safety procedures. Ask the artist or owner of the parlor if you can observe a customer getting a tattoo and check to make sure that the artist is carefully following the standard safety precautions listed above. If the artist is reluctant to answer questions about safety practices, shop around for another tattoo parlor that is more willing to talk. Another basic rule is to shop around for an artist based on their experience and knowledge and to stay away from any artist or shop that advertises “low-cost” or “bargain tattoos.” The price of the artist should be a reflection of their experience, knowledge and artistry.

As consumers we should all be careful about safety practices and make it our responsibility to keep it safe.
HCSP FACT SHEET  a series of fact sheets written by experts in the field of liver disease

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Reference:


For more information on hepatitis and tattoos check out the Hepatitis & Tattoos website: http://www.hepatitistattoos.org/

Related publications:

- HCV Transmission and Prevention Overview
- How Long Does HCV Live on Surfaces and in Syringes?
- Preventing HCV and Transmission in Personal Care Settings

For more information:

- Americans with Disabilities Act
  www.ada.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov
- Mayo Clinic
  www.mayoclinic.com
- MedlinePlus
  www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus

Visit our websites to learn more about viral hepatitis:

www.hcvadvocate.org • www.hbvadvocate.org
www.hepatitistattoos.org

Get Tested. Get Treated. Get Cured.