



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
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July 21, 2010 – Guide to Safe Tattoos

Tina L. Cunningham is a Community Education and Outreach Specialist with Centre/Huntingdon Tapestry of Health. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

If you or someone in your family is thinking of getting a tattoo, it is important to know how to get a quality tattoo done safely. The state of Pennsylvania requires a person to be 18 to get a tattoo without parental permission. For those under 18, with 13 being the youngest, a parent must be present. If any place is tattooing minors, they should be reported and not considered reputable.

So now that you know the law, and you know you want a tattoo, should you just walk in off the street and get one? Start looking at people with tattoos. Ask where they got it done and how the experience was. Would they recommend this parlor? Tattoo shops' best advertisers are their customers, so spend some time looking around. Each artist has a unique style.

The next step is to visit the shop and, I should note, there should be a shop. By this I mean, a reputable tattoo artist will not be working out of their home or in a garage or basement somewhere. Ask them about their safety precautions and sterilization procedures. All reusable tattooing equipment should be sterilized in an autoclave. Most places reuse electric guns and plastic tubing which should be sterilized regularly. Some even sterilize and reuse needles. An autoclave uses high pressure steam to sterilize and is what medical facilities use. There is no substitute for safety.

When the tattoo is being done, there are several safety practices to be on the lookout for. First of all, the artist should put on latex gloves, and they should remain on for the entire procedure. Many will change gloves several times. Next, the needles for the tattoo should all be in sealed sterile packages and opened in front of you. The guns and tubes may or may not be in a sterile package depending on how often they are sterilized. Anything that cannot be in a sterile packet should be covered with plastic covering. In addition, all ink for the tattoo should be poured into disposable tubs and this should be done in front of you also. I repeat, it should all be done in front of you. Needles should then be disposed of in a sharps container, like you see in a hospital. All razors used to shave skin prior to the tattoo should be new, opened in front of you and then thrown into the sharps bin. If the shop uses deodorant stick to help to adhere the design to the skin, it should be applied using a tissue.

The bottom line is take your time, research and ask questions to get the best, safest tattoo possible.

If you would like a more comprehensive presentation on tattooing and piercing, please contact Tina Cunningham at Tapestry Family Planning at 814-360-6650 or at tcunningham@fhccp.org. It is free to any group and lasts around 30-40 minutes.

Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care*

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