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## How do I know if tattooing or piercing will be safe?



**The Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, a program of the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), provides information resources on HIV prevention, care and treatment as well as a range of other HIV/AIDS information.**

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The safest way to get a tattoo or piercing is to go to a professional. In tattooing or piercing, HIV can be transmitted by tiny, invisible particles of blood on equipment that has not been sterilized correctly. These particles can also be in the tattoo ink.

### Professional piercers:

- use jewelry made of surgical steel or niobium
- don't use stud guns.

### Professional tattooists:

- pour ink into new, disposable containers
- use these containers only for your tattoo.

### Professional piercers and tattooists:

- use sterile needles every time
- wear latex gloves
- have information about safety posted in the waiting area
- give instructions on how to prevent infection (after-care)
- are experienced and knowledgeable
- sterilize reusable equipment in an autoclave (a machine that uses very hot water to sterilize equipment—equipment should be sterilized at 121°C (250°F) for 30 minutes).

### How do I choose a safe place to get a tattoo or piercing?

Get information from your local health department. Visit different shops and ask to see:

- special containers for disposal of used needles (bio-hazard containers)
- disposable ink cups for tattoo inks
- the autoclave (with a temperature gauge), and
- some sterilized packages (should have black lines on packages to indicate that they reached the right temperature).

**Check out several businesses; ask questions about their experience and safety measures. If you are not satisfied—LEAVE.**

If you have already had an amateur or professional tattoo and think you may have been infected with HIV, or hepatitis, or any other blood-borne illness, you should consider getting tested (see Question 22 “Should I get tested for HIV?” and Question 23 “How do I get tested?”).

Remember, behaviours and activities that put you at risk for HIV infection also put you at risk for infection by other viruses. Co-infection rates are increasing in Canada, particularly for HIV and hepatitis C, with approximately 11,200 people infected with both viruses (see Question 29 “Is there a connection between HIV and hepatitis C?”).

*For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.*

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For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, 400-1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1  
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**For more information on HIV/AIDS or for local services, contact:**