



Body art - piercings and tattoos - have become increasingly popular among teens. *The providers at Advanced Pediatrics recommend against body piercings (other than earlobe) and tattoos and urge parents and teens to discuss the safety and risks associated with body art.* In addition to the health risks associated with body piercings and tattoos, studies show that teens participating in body piercings and tattooing are more likely to engage in other risk-taking behaviors, such as eating disorders, drug use, increased sexual activity and suicide.

What is body piercing?

Body piercing is the creation of a hole anywhere in the body (typically the ear, eyebrow, lip, nose, tongue, navel, nipple or genitalia) to insert jewelry. It is performed by inserting a hollow core needle through a body part to remove a core of tissue, then inserting jewelry to hold the hole open while it heals.

What are the risks of body piercing?

Body piercings are often performed in unregulated, unlicensed shops. All piercings have the potential to introduce blood borne germs or viruses into the body. Risks associated with body piercing include:

- Chronic infection, abscesses or boils.
- Prolonged bleeding, scarring (including keloids), nerve damage and inflammation.
- Allergic reaction.
- Transmission of hepatitis B and C, tetanus, and HIV.
- People with certain types of heart disease have an increased risk of developing an infection in their heart following body piercing.

Body piercing in certain areas of the body can cause more problems than others:

- Infection is common in mouth and nose piercings due to the bacteria that live in those areas.
- Tongue, cheek and lip piercings can damage teeth and cause gum problems and speech impediments.
- **Piercings in the ear cartilage, navel, nostril and genitalia may take up to a year to heal properly.**
- Stretching - the expansion of the pierced hole to accommodate larger diameter jewelry (including flesh tunnels) - creates permanent disfigurement, which can only be reversed through plastic surgery.

What is a tattoo?

A tattoo is a puncture wound made deep in the skin that is filled with ink. It is made by injecting ink into the dermis of the skin with a needle. The dermis is a deeper layer of skin with very stable cells, so a tattoo is virtually permanent. Though some tattoos are still done manually, most use a tattoo machine which moves the needle in and out while driving in the ink. Because the skin is punctured, there is usually a lot of bleeding associated and most people experience pain.

What are the risks of getting a tattoo?

Like body piercings, tattoos are often performed in unregulated, unlicensed shops and have the potential to introduce blood borne germs or viruses into the body. Risks associated with tattoos include:

- Bacterial infection and dermatitis.
- Prolonged bleeding and scarring (including keloids).
- Allergic reaction to dyes.
- Transmission of hepatitis B and C, tetanus, HIV, syphilis, leprosy, cutaneous tuberculosis and other infections.

In addition to health risks, many teens later regret getting a tattoo and removal is painful, very expensive and often leaves skin scarred and darker or lighter than normal skin.

Still wish to get a body piercing or tattoo?

While the providers at Advanced Pediatrics strongly recommend against body piercings and tattoos, we recommend the following safety tips if your teen is still considering body piercing or a tattoo:

- Make sure that all immunizations are up to date, including the series of three hepatitis B vaccinations and a tetanus booster.
- Anyone prone to getting keloid scars (an overgrowth of scar tissue) should avoid getting body piercings or tattoos, as there is a high risk of disfigurement.
- Anyone with heart disease, allergies, diabetes, skin disorders (including eczema), a compromised immune system or pregnant should consult with a health care provider before getting a body piercing or tattoo.
- When selecting a piercing or tattoo studio, check for the following:
 - Work area should be clean and have good lighting.
 - Consent forms should be required for all minors under 18 years of age.
 - Studio should use an autoclave (heat sterilization machine) to sterilize equipment between customers.
 - Packaged, sterilized needles should be used only once and disposed of in a biohazard container.
 - Tattoo artist or body piercer should wash hands thoroughly before procedure and wear latex gloves.
 - Piercing gun should not be used as it cannot be sterilized properly. Only jewelry made of non-corrosive metal, such as surgical stainless steel, niobium, or solid 14 karat gold is safe for a new piercing.
 - Leftover tattoo ink should be disposed of after each procedure and never poured back into the bottle and reused.
 - Studio should follow Occupational Safety and Health Administration's **Universal Precautions** which outline procedures when dealing with bodily fluids such as blood.
- Follow all after care instructions the studio gives to ensure the best chance of healing.
- Seek medical attention immediately if you develop a fever, illness, redness, swelling, tenderness, drainage or pus.