

Preventing Cross-Contamination in Tattooing

Cross-contamination is the act of spreading bacteria and viruses from one surface to another. Since bloodborne viruses can live on objects and surfaces for up to a week, germs could be spread when surfaces are not disinfected the right way or if equipment is not cleaned and sterilized between clients.

Some examples of cross-contamination are:

A piercer places his tools on a counter that has not been disinfected and then uses the tools for a piercing procedure without sterilizing them.

A tattooist, while working on a client, answers the phone without removing her gloves. By not removing her gloves, the artist may spread bacteria and viruses from the gloves onto the phone. Other people using the phone could then be exposed to a disease.

- **Gloves should be changed when it is necessary**

Gloves must be removed and thrown away whenever a tattooist or piercer leaves his or her work area.

Gloves should be changed if they tear.

Disposable gloves must not be washed or reused.



- **Hands should be washed often**

Hand washing can get rid of most the disease-causing organisms on

When wearing gloves, heat and moisture build up. This creates the right conditions to allow bacteria to reproduce. To lessen the spread of viruses and bacteria, tattooists and piercers should wash their hands before and after wearing gloves.

Gloves are not a substitute for hand washing.



- **Surfaces should be disinfected often**

Body artists should disinfect surfaces, such as the client's chair and counter space, betw

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a list of registered disinfectants that are made to kill certain bacteria and viruses. EPA-registered tuberculocidal disinfectants are best for cleaning surfaces contaminated with blood.

The germ that causes tuberculosis is one of the most difficult to kill. Any disinfectant that claims to be able to eliminate the tuberculosis germ can also kill HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C viruses.

Many disinfectants need to stay on surfaces for a specific amount of time to fully disinfect the surface before being wiped down. The instructions included with the disinfectant should note the amount of time needed to properly disinfect an area.

- **Reusable tools and equipment should be cleaned before being sterilized**

Cleaning is the first step in removing viruses and bacteria from equipment.

Reusable tools and equipment should first be washed before being sterilized.

If washing tools manually, piercers and tattooists should use a brush or similar tool whenever possible.



Ultrasonic cleaners work well to clean tools in hard-to-reach places and reduce the amount of time contaminated equipment is handled. Shop employers should check with the owner's manual to be sure the machine is cared for correctly.

- **Use disposable "single-use" supplies whenever possible**

Disposable supplies, such as pigment caps, razors, rinse cups, and sterilized pre-made needle bars, should be used once and disposed of. By not reusing disposable supplies, the possibility of being exposed to blood while cleaning them is avoided.

- **Sterilization machines must be regularly tested and serviced**

Autoclave machines use steam, pressure, and temperature to kill bacteria, fungi, and viruses. Gauge readings and the color change of indicator strips on autoclave packaging are not reliable ways of ensuring an autoclave is sterilizing correctly.

If the machine is not well cared for, it may not reach the conditions needed to

Monthly spore tests can check if an autoclave is sterilizing correctly.

The employer should ensure the autoclave is regularly serviced. The owner's manual should provide information about the maintenance schedule.



- **Tattooists and piercers must attend bloodborne pathogen training at least yearly**

OSHA regulations require employers to provide yearly bloodborne pathogen training at no cost to employees with the option of taking the course during work hours. Record of training must be kept by employers.

