

Alliance of Professional Tattooists

Frequently Asked Questions

Basic Guidelines for Getting a Tattoo

The last ten years have seen an educational renaissance within the tattoo industry. Artists have become increasingly aware of the potential risks associated with blood borne pathogens and have taken steps to protect their clients and themselves. With just a little education and some research, you can assure yourself of a safe, professional tattoo.

Will I get HIV or AIDS?

~ HIV is a very delicate virus and does not survive long outside the human body. Nor is it spread through casual contact. Generally, the virus is only transmitted when sufficient quantities of highly infected blood are introduced into the body of another. The structure of tattoo needles does not lend itself to HIV transmission. According to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, there has never been a case of HIV transmission from tattooing in the United States. Cases outside the US were not positively attributed to tattooing because all reported cases also fit the profile of a "high risk" lifestyle.

What about Hepatitis?

~ The disease to consider when getting tattooed is hepatitis. Hepatitis, unlike HIV, is a very hardy virus that can survive long periods outside the human body and can be transmitted through little more than a scratch with an infected needle. To combat this and any other infectious blood borne pathogen, artists autoclave their single service equipment, use individual portions of ink and lubricant, dispose of used sharps according to OSHA guidelines, use EPA registered virucidals to clean their stations between clients, and use barrier protection. These procedures are called Standard Precautions. Basically, the artist must treat everyone (including themselves) as though they were infectious. That way, everyone is protected and the potential for infection is reduced to next to nothing.

How should I pick an artist?

~ APT admits artists based on their desire to educate themselves in safe tattoo procedure rather than artistic merit. For that reason, we do not recommend specific artists. Not to mention, there are a number of excellent artists who, for whatever reason, have not joined APT. While we would like you to patronize one of our artists, it would be a shame to pass up an excellent artist simply because they did not belong to our organization. You can still assure yourself that you are in good hands by following a few simple guidelines.

Your concerns are twofold. You need to find an artist whose work you like, who will work on you safely. Ask people where they got tattooed, especially if you really like the work you see. Ask to see photographs of the artist's work. Most often, the pictures will have been taken right after the work was completed, so redness and swelling are common. In spite of that, there are things you can learn. Are the lines clean and smooth or broken and jagged? Do they meet up? Does the artist work in the style you are looking for? Taking time to check out a few artists and shops will ensure that you are happy with your results.

At the shop

~ Make sure the shop is neat and clean. What you see in the front room is a pretty good indication of what you will see elsewhere in the shop. Ask questions about the shop's safety procedures. What are they doing to ensure your health and well-being? The personnel should be willing and able to answer you questions. If you feel they are brushing your concerns aside or can't answer you, leave and seek

out a *professional* shop.

What is single service equipment?

~ All equipment should be single service. This means that each needle and tube set is individually packaged, dated and sealed and autoclaved. The artist should open a fresh set of needles and tubes in front of you. Any ointments, pigments, needles, gloves, razors, plastic trays or containers used in applying your new tattoo are discarded after use. After the tattoo application, the artist will disinfect the work area with an EPA approved virucidal that will kill any surface bacteria or viruses.

What is an autoclave?

~ An autoclave is the only acceptable means of equipment sterilization in the tattoo shop. It is a machine that uses a combination of heat, steam and pressure to kill all pathogenic microorganisms known to man. If the shop does not use an autoclave, do not get tattooed there. Shops should keep regular records of their autoclave use and testing. Ask to see them if you feel uncertain.

Why does the artist wear gloves?

~ Your artist should be wearing gloves any time they are touching broken skin and should change their gloves regularly. This protects both you and the artist from any blood borne pathogens that may be present.

This is my first tattoo.....What should I expect?

~ Getting your first tattoo can be a very exciting experience and being prepared for what to expect can keep it fun. First, you should be well rested and well fed. If you are tired, or your blood sugar is low, you may experience a higher level of discomfort than you normally would. Drinking alcohol before getting tattooed is always a bad idea. Not only do you become dehydrated, it will also cause you to bleed more and consequently have a negative effect on your new tattoo.

There will be blood. The amount varies from person to person, but usually it is about what you would expect from a scraped knee or rug burn. The level of pain also varies from person to person, but most people don't find it unbearable. The best thing to do is just accept the discomfort and relax. Fighting or tensing will only increase your discomfort.

If you start to feel faint or a little "green," tell your artist right away instead of toughing it out. There is absolutely nothing wrong with taking a break. Your artist is prepared for this sort of thing and knows how to handle it.

If you need to change position or stretch, go to the bathroom, sneeze or wiggle for any reason, let your artist know BEFORE you do it.

Your new tattoo will get a patch of shiny skin over it or it may scab over. Leave the scab alone!~ This is a normal part of the healing process. Picking the scab may lead to infection or damage to your tattoo. The scab will slough off gradually in the course of a week or two. If you have any questions during the healing process, call your artist. Don't rely on stories told to you by your friends.

A.P.T., Inc. ~ 2108 S. Alveron Way ~ Tucson, AZ 85711
Phone: (520) 514-5549 Fax: (520) 514-5579 Email: info@safe-tattoos.com