

About...Tattoos

What is a tattoo?

By Indiana Law, a tattoo is:

1. Any indelible design, letter, scroll, figure, symbol, or other mark placed with the aid of needles or other instruments; or
2. Any design, letter, scroll, figure, symbol done by scarring on or under the skin.

How is a tattoo done?

A needle, connected to a small machine with tubes containing dye, repeatedly pricks into the skin. Each needle puncture inserts tiny droplets of ink. The process, which may last several hours for a large tattoo, causes a small amount of bleeding.

What laws govern tattooing in Indiana?

In 1997, Indiana Code 16-19-3-4.1 required the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) to adopt rules to regulate the sanitary operation of tattoo parlors. The rule, 410 IAC 1-5, became law on June 12, 1998, and was readopted July 21, 2004. The following are some requirements of the tattoo rule:

- All tattooists must receive yearly training concerning how diseases are spread by contact with blood.
- To receive a tattoo, anyone under 18 years of age must be accompanied by, and have written permission from, a parent or legal guardian.
- Gloves or other appropriate personal protection must be worn when performing tattooing procedures and when handling blood.
- All needles must be sterile and designed for single use.
- Reusable tubes must be sterilized.
- Infectious waste must be handled properly according to Indiana law (<http://www.in.gov/legislative/ic/code/title16/ar41/ch16.html>).

What is NOT included in the rule?

The rule does NOT:

- Require a tattooist to register with the ISDH.
- Require the ISDH to perform routine inspections of tattoo parlors.
- Require tattooists to receive training or certification on the tattooing process.

Tattooists should contact their local health department for local laws that might pertain to the registration or licensing of tattoo parlors. Investigations may occur as the result of a complaint filed with the local health department. Some local health departments perform routine inspections based on county ordinances. Call your local health department for more information about inspections.

What should you look for when selecting a tattoo parlor?

- The tattooist and parlor should be neat and clean in appearance.
- Patron (client) rights must be displayed.
- There should be hand-washing facilities with running water available for the tattooist to use.
- The staff should be willing and able to answer your questions.
- Tattooists should not work when sick.
- Tattooists must wear gloves when tattooing.
- All equipment should be single service. Each needle and tube set should be individually packaged, dated, sealed, sterilized, and opened immediately prior to your tattoo.
- A new ink supply should be poured into a disposable container.
- Any razors, needles, ink, plastic trays or containers, gloves, or ointments used in your tattoo application should be discarded after use.
- Appropriate disinfectants should be used to clean the work area after tattoo application.

What are the risks of getting a tattoo?

While a tattoo may only take a few minutes to acquire, it is permanent. You should understand the risks and research the process before getting a tattoo. Tattooing involves breaking the skin, one of your body's main protective barriers. This means you can be more susceptible to skin and blood infections. Specific risks include:

- Blood-borne diseases such as HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C could be contracted if equipment used for your tattoo is contaminated with the blood of an infected person (please refer to Quick Facts [about HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C](#)).
- Unsterile tattooing equipment or re-used ink can cause symptoms of minor skin infections, from redness, swelling, or pus-like drainage, to potentially serious antibiotic-resistant skin infections (please refer to Quick Facts [about MRSA](#)).
- Granulomas, or bumps, may form around the site of the tattoo as a reaction to the ink.
- Tattooing can cause keloids, or raised areas of excessive scarring, if you are prone to them.
- Inks may cause allergic reactions, such as an itchy rash, at the tattoo site.
- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exams may cause swelling or burning of tattooed areas.

What are some signs of an infection?

Your tattooist should tell you what to expect after getting a tattoo. Some swelling around the tattoo is normal. You should contact your health care provider if you have any of any of the following signs of infection:

- Thick yellow or green drainage from the tattoo site
- Continuous oozing or bleeding
- Red streaks or a hot sensation surrounding and moving away from the tattooed area
- Worsening pain
- Any unusual swelling

How should you care for a tattoo?

The tattooist should provide you with detailed instructions on care for your tattoo to include:

- Cleaning with soap and water
- Applying moisturizer
- Avoiding sun exposure
- Not picking at scabs

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Guide for Sanitary Operations of Tattoo and Body Piercing Facilities in Indiana at <http://www.in.gov/isdh/publications/tattoo/index.htm>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration blood-borne pathogen Standard 29 CFR 1910.1030

Food and Drug Administration, Tattoos and Permanent Makeup at <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/CFSAN/~dms/cos-204.html>

Alliance of Professional Tattooists at www.safe-tattoos.com

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